

The Trojan Horse: Jerusalem

By J.J. Benítez

Translated by LS Thomas

Translator's Dedication

This translation is dedicated with gratitude to the
Right Reverend Patrick Baxter
who was always right by me.

A special thanks to
E. Noyola
who was this project's handmaid
without her help
it would not have been possible.

Biography

J.J. Benítez is 54 years old.
He has completed almost 30 years of research.
He has been around the world more than 100 times.
At this point he is ready to finish his 40th book.
Four sons.
Three dogs.
Two loves: Blanca and the sea.
And one BOSS: Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

His interest in this topic began in 1975 when scientists announced that the linen shroud of St. Turin could have been used to wrap the Galilean's body. Then he was guided by a mysterious "force" to travel all over the planet—without rest— to investigate his beloved god and partner.

Once he concludes his ambitious work: *The Trojan Horse*, if his "Boss" does not change his mind, J.J. Benítez is hoping to have 120 books in this project.

Recently J.J. Benítez has published *My Favorite UFO's* (Planeta) which is the second installment in his collection *The Almost Secret Notebooks*.

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*To Gabriel Del Barrio García a noble socialist
veteran who will precede me into the Kingdom of
Heaven.*

*(On behalf of the many friends who helped me
throughout the hundred days of permanent submersion
during the manifestation of The Trojan Horse.)*

There are many other things that Jesus did. If they were written down one by one, I believe this world would not be able to hold all of the books.

The Gospel of John [21-25]

WASHINGTON D.C. I

My watch says three o'clock in the afternoon. In two hours the Arlington National Cemetery will close its gates. I have consumed almost all of this Monday, October 12 in front of the tombs of the three unknown soldiers, standing before a miniscule perpetual orange flame which enlivens the rustic grey flagstones above the remains of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Although I had eventually learned the clue by heart from reading it so many times, I consult the code the Major gave me again. For the umpteenth time I scrutinize the solid white marble sarcophagus which lies facing east, towards the Memorial Amphitheater. It is the earliest and most prominent monument, more highlighted than the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. On the west side, there are three carved figures symbolizing the Victory of obtaining Peace through Valor. However, the plaque does not seem to have any connection to my code. Slowly, like a stereotypical tourist, I walk beside the cord that runs along the small rectangular plaza and sit in front of the rear face of the central tomb on steps of the small amphitheater. Exhausted, I review everything I have noted. In front of me, about five meters from the tomb, an infantry soldier from the First Battalion of the Old Guard—which is based in Fort Meyers, paces back and forth, dressed in a full ceremonial uniform with a rifle on his shoulder.

Even though the security chain separates me ten meters from the tomb, I can comfortably read the inscription engraved in the marble: *Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God.* I nervously ask myself: Could this be the clue?

The lone sentinel, as cold and thin as the bayonet which crowns his rifle, halts. After a brief pause, he turns around and switches his rifle to his other shoulder. Then he retraces his steps, stopping in front of the tomb. There he repeats the action of changing the position of his gun, then he turns again resuming his solemn march.

My friend, the American major, had referred to the soldier who stands guard day and night over the cemetery of heroes in Washington, DC.

'The sentinel, who holds the vigil in front of the tomb, will reveal the ritual of Arlington,' reads the first sentence of the last letter he wrote before he died....

MEXICO CITY

But first, as it will be, before I continue with this new adventure, I relate when and under what circumstances, I came to know the major and how I became involved in one of the strangest investigations, more fascinating than anything I have undertaken.

In the month of April, in 1980, due to matters irrelevant to the present case, I found myself in Mexico City. It has scarcely been a few months since I wrote my first book about the discovery of the shroud of St. Turin by NASA scientists. I remember one of my interviews on Aztec television—specifically a prestigious and popular informational program hosted by Jacobo Zabłudowsky—where I made some comments, in particular about the terrifying tortures that Jesus of Nazareth had been subjected to. To both my surprise and that of the television crew, that night they registered a torrent of calls from disparate points in the city and even from Miami and California.

Upon my return to the hotel, the switchboard operator at President Chapultepec's let a call go through that I will never forget.

"Mr. J. J. Benítez?"

"Yes, talk to me..."

"Are you J. J. Benítez?"

"Yes, I am...who is speaking?"

"I saw Mr. Zabłudowsky's program and I would be very honored if I could converse with you."

"That's nice of you to say," I respond almost mechanically. At the time he is preventing me from falling into bed. In those first moments I confuse my communication with him with that of a typical curious person. I am ready to liquidate the conversation at the first opportunity.

"You have divined from my accent that I am a foreigner...when I listened to you; I was sincerely impressed by your interest in Christ."

"Excuse me," I interrupt as I figure out what to rely on. "What did you say your name was?"

"No, I didn't tell you my name. And if you allow me, I offer my condition as a former pilot in the North American Air Force; however, I would prefer not to reveal myself over the telephone."

That put me on my guard. I sit up: intent on ordering my ideas.

"I don't know what your plan is for working in Mexico," he continues in an extremely affable tone, "but perhaps it would be of great interest to you for us to see each other. What do you think?"

"I don't know," I say doubtfully. "Where are you?"

"I am calling from the state of Tabasco. Do you foresee taking some trip to this zone?"

"Frankly, no; but..."

Once again, I am allowing my intuition to lead me. A former pilot from the USAF? It would be interesting...

My experience with investigations has taught me how to accept risk. What can I lose in this interview?

"Can you tell me something in advance?" I insinuate without restraining my curiosity.

"No...believe me. I cannot over the telephone...Furthermore; it is not my desire to deceive you. And now, ahead of our first conversation, if it is going to occur, it's probably best not to start off with too many conclusions. However, I insist that we meet..."

"Very well," I cut him off with a certain brusqueness. I accept. Where and when can we meet?"

"Can you travel as far as Villa Hermosa? I will be here until Saturday. Do you know the city?"

"Yes, I suppose," I respond a bit contrarily.

If my memory does not fail me, in July 1977 Raquel and I visited the Palenque archeological zone in the state of Chiapas and the colossal Olmecas heads in Villa Hermosa. But now I find myself in the City a thousand kilometers from the torrid Tabascian region.

"One moment. Let me check my schedule..."

The truth is that I know beforehand that no commitments exist on that Friday. But to have to make a trip to Tabasco without guarantees or references from a person who attempts to interview me has me irritated. I zealously search for any excuse to get me out of this headless trip. There are tense seconds. On the one side, my journalistic instinct pulls me towards Villa Hermosa. On the other, a common feeling is beginning to trip up my fragile enthusiasm. Fortunately for me, the first one prevails and I accept.

"Very good. I believe there is a flight leaving Mexico first thing in the morning. Where can I meet you?"

"Do you know the Parque de la Venta?" The man must perceive my doubts. He adds, "The one with the olmecas heads..."

"Yes, I know it."

"I will be waiting for you next to the Grand Altar..."

"But how will I recognize you?"

"Don't worry about it."

That confidence fascinates me.

"...what is most probable," he concludes, "is that you will recognize me first."

"Very well. In any case, I will have a book in my hands..."

"As you wish."

"Then...see you on Friday."

"Right. Thank you very much for paying attention to my call."

"It has been a pleasure," I lie. "Good night."

"When the phone hangs up in my ear, I am assaulted by a swarm of doubts. Why had I accepted so quickly? What guaranteed do I have that this surprise foreigner was a retired pilot from the U.S. Air Force? What if it is a joke? At the same time, something in me decides that I must go to Villa Hermosa. This man's tone of voice gave me the impression I was in the presence of a sincere person. But what does he want to communicate to me?

Naturally, I ponder this enigmatic information. The most logical reason, I say to myself during my futile attempts to fall asleep—is that it is about some hoax UFO case carried out by the North American military. Or not? Why did he cite my interest in Christ? What does seeing a military veteran have to do with this subject?

To tell the truth, I am so removed from the event and it is so dense that I feel irritated. So I opt for the only practical solution: forget about it until Friday April 18.

TABASCO

At 10:15am, barely an hour after clearing the Benito Juárez Airport in Mexico, I touched Earth in Villa Hermosa. As I step on the runway, a familiar tingling sensation in my stomach announces the beginning of a new adventure. There I am, under a tropical sun, with my inseparable black camera bag on my shoulder and a copy of my book, *The Messenger*, in my hands. We will see what destiny brings me, I think to myself while crossing the scorching runway to the terminal building. That situation—why am I going to deny it— fascinates me. I have always liked playing the detective...Consequently, from the moment I leave the Mexicana Aviation company's jet, which transported me to the state of Tabasco; I fix my attention on the people waiting in the airport. Would the mysterious informer be there?

Based on the timber of his voice, my anonymous friend must be about fifty years old. Perhaps more, if one considers that he is a pilot retired from active service. I hold the book in my left hand so the front cover remains visible and walk sluggishly to the currency exchange. If the American was here, he would have detected me. I exchange some dollars and, with the same calmness, I direct myself towards the exit in search of a taxi. No one makes the least movement nor does anyone walk towards me. It is clear that the foreigner was not at the airport or, at least he had no desire to give a sign of life.

A few minutes later, at 11:15am on Friday April 18, 1980, an employee of the Parque de Museo de la Venta hands me the appropriate entrance ticket along with a simple map detailing the location of the gigantic Olmeca sculptures. The park seems peaceful. I consult the map and check for the Grand Altar—our meeting point. It is located exactly in the center of a beautiful open air museum. The itinerary lists a total of twenty-seven monuments. I must have arrived at enclave number 5. If everything marches along well, that is where I will finally meet him—my informer.

Without losing any time, I follow some red footprints, which have been painted by the park attendants, to a narrow path. The footprints are a simple aid for visitors. A few meters to my left, I discover monument Number 1. I was on speaking terms with a formidable partially destroyed thirty ton jaguar head. I continue the hike into the interior of a small dense forest. My heart begins to beat more briskly. At about eighty steps, sculptures of a monkey and another jaguar appear on the right side of the path. They are monuments Number 2 and 3. In front of the jaguar, the map indicates a statute of a manatee carved in serpentine. It is Number 4.

I advance thirty more meters and go around a curve in the road, I recognize enclave number 4 again, inside the thicket is another small jaguar also carved in basalt. The next one will be the Grand Altar Triumphal. The final meters leading to the small informational sign where monument Number 5 rises up are singularly intense. Up to this point I have not encountered a single tourist. My only companion in forming my thoughts is the crazy racket from the infinite number of multicolored birds flashing between the treetops among the corpulent huacamaya birds, the parrots, and the cedars.

As I enter the clearing, I stop. My heart turns. The Grand Altar is deserted. Beneath the altar in a central niche, a muscular nude grips a dagger in his left hand. With his right hand, the statue fastens a rope which permanently binds a prisoner. The furious midday sun returns me to reality.

"Where is that damned Yankee?" I stammer indignantly. The only idea I have is to tear out my hair. Dismayed, I approach the Grand Altar, feeling the white pebbles grind beneath my boots. Maybe I am ahead of him, I think in a weak attempt to mollify myself.

Immediately I am on alert—I assume—by the noise of steps on the gravel. A man appears from behind a large massive wall. Both of us remain motionless for a few seconds, observing each other. I will never forget those seconds. Before me is a tall grey-haired individual, wearing a lightweight shirt and white pants. My breathing eases. Without a doubt this is my anonymous informer.

"Good morning," he exclaims as he removes his sunglasses and draws a broad smile. "Are you J.J. Benítez?"

I nod and he extends his hand. The Earth gives great importance to this pleasure. I like people who do it vigorously. The handshake is solid, like one between two friends who meet again after a long time.

"I am grateful you have come," he remarks. "I hope that you won't regret meeting me."

Judging from his appearance, skinny with a face riddled with wrinkles—maybe he is around seventy years old. His eyes are clear and sharp as saber; they inspire my confidence. I do not know the reason, but from our first meeting at the foot of the Grand Altar de Museo de la Venta, a mutual current of confidence is established between us.

"I know a restaurant where we can talk. Are you hungry?"

I do not have the least bit of an appetite, yet I accept. I am consumed by curiosity.

After a few minutes, we finally sit down in some dark, shadowy establishment at the end of 18 Parabelo Street. On the way there neither of us exchanges a single word. I suppose my new friend is doing the same as me: trying to discover everything about the other down to the most trivial details...Ever since our first greeting in the museum with the gigantic negroid heads, the certainly that I have found myself before some possibly good news has been gaining ground.

"Tell me something," I break the silence with an invitation for my companion to start talking.

"First of all, I want to remind you of what I said on the telephone: it is possible for you to feel disappointed after this first conversation."

"Why?"

"I want to be very sincere with you. I barely know you. I don't know how far one can take your honesty..."

I allow him to speak. His slow and cordial tone makes things much easier.

"First of all, in order for me to deposit the information I possess into your hands, it is necessary for you to demonstrate your trust in me. That is why. And I ask you not to be alarmed. It is necessary to test and to be confident with your strength of spirit and above all, with your interest in Christ."

The American brings his lips to a glass of orange juice and continues piercing me with his falcon gaze. He must notice my confusion. Why the devil does he have to see evidence of the firmness of my spirit in Christ or better said, with my interest in Jesus?

"Allow me a few of questions, sir..."

"If it doesn't bother you," he says as he revives a fleeting smile. "Call me Major. For the moment—and for reasons of security—I cannot tell you my real name."

"That annoys me, but I accept it." What else can you do if you want to get to the truth at the bottom of this enigmatic subject?

"That's fine Major. Let's do it in parts. In the first place, you say that you are a retired officer from the US Air Force. Am I wrong?"

"No, no. That's what I am."

"Good. Second question: what does my interest in Christ have to do with the information you say that you have?"

The waiter places each tray of green molé, quesadillas, slices of sea bass and an immense fillet of tampiqueña meat, on the red tablecloth. The Major remains quiet. Now I am sure this is a difficult situation for him. My friend struggles to contain himself.

"When you have understood the nature of this information you will understand my precautions," he emphatically points out. "It is precisely before what follows that I must be convinced that you or the chosen person will be capable of valor and most importantly, will make good use of it."

"I haven't finished understanding why you chose me..."

The Major maintains his penetrating gaze and immediately asks, "Do you believe in chance?"

"Frankly, no."

"When I saw you on TV and heard you say a phrase, I called you on impulse. That hour you had the courage to publically present an account—to share your research about what the NASA scientists had "discovered" about Jesus of Nazareth and you did not seem ashamed of Christ."

I smile.

"And why should I if I truly believe in him?"

"This is what you conveyed during the program. And that, nothing more, nothing less is what I am seeking."

No. I cannot control myself. At point blank range I blurt out, "Excuse me, are you a member of some religious sect?"

The major seems disconcerted, but he does not stop smiling. This provides me with some new data about his personality.

"I live alone and I am retired. I am a believer and I cannot explain why beyond that point. However, I have withdrawn from any type of church or religious group. You can be assured that you do not find yourself before a fanatic."

I believe I can perceive a few drops of sadness or melancholy in some of his words. Today, as I recall it, I was satisfied that I was dissecting the enigma of the American Major. I cannot avoid poaching an emotion, nor having a profound respect for this man.

"Where do you live?"

"In the Yucatán."

"Can I ask why you live alone and retired?"

Before he can respond, I try to corner him with a second question. "Do you have something I can see about the information you know?"

He responds to this with a resounding yes.

A new silence falls between us.

"And what do you want to do?"

The Major extracts a small, discolored, blue notebook from one of his shirt pockets. He writes down a few words and hands me a sheet of paper. It is the address of a post office box in Chichén Itza City in the aforementioned Yucatán.

"I want us to keep in contact," he answers as he points to the address. "Can you write down your P.O. Box address for me?"

"Of course, but..."

The man seems to guess my thoughts and replies with a firmness which leaves no place for hesitation. "It is necessary for me to test your sincerity. I beg you not to be insulted. I only want to be sure. Although now I don't understand how, I know my days are numbered..."

That confession perplexes me. "Are you telling me you know that you are doing to die?"

The Major lowers his eyes and I curse my tactless mistake.

"Pardon me..."

"Don't apologize," the officer continues, switching to a jovial tone. "To die is good, not bad."

If I insinuate that he knows the moment is close, then he is not in front of a joker or a madman.

"How will I know if you have decided whether or not I am the suitable person?"

"I still hope we will return and see each other again soon. Don't worry. We will simply know it."

"No, I can't pretend anymore. You know I investigate UFO phenomena..."

"I know it..."

"Can you at least clarify if this information that you have has something to do with seeing aliens?"

"The only thing I can tell you is no."

I am taken aback by this ending. Two hours later, with my spirit retreating from the doubts, I peel away from Villa Hermosa and set off for Mexico City. Then I am unable to imagine what destiny has in store.

YUCATÁN

I return to Spain. For several months the Major and I exchange a series of letters. These days my activities in a UFO investigation reach a volume and an intensity which is sufficiently distinguished to tempt the various intelligence agencies in my country. Then I become aware—and I am still aware now—that my phone is tapped and, on very rare occasions, there are unnatural inquiries by subtle agents from the Department of Information—both civil and military, who are very closely following my interviews and excursions. Those sniffer dogs will never know—at least I hope not, since as a precaution against my correspondence being intercepted, I have rented a special post office box with the help of a good friend who will always appear to be its legitimate user. This sophistry allows me to divert the “official” channel of general letters, documents and information that I want to isolate from the unhealthy curiosity of the aforementioned secret agents. Naturally, given the Major’s nationality and his seniority in his profession, in order for his missives to pass through it is always necessary for them to be conducted confidentially. Not even my woman, Raquel, knows about the existence of this new friend, nor of our subsequent contact.

Nevertheless, letters from the Major fall into the secret service agents’ hands and there was much in their content to get their attention. No matter how much I press, the information he says I will possess slides away on a single trail and I never obtain it. Our amiable letters always focus on the most intense and extensive understanding of my method of thinking, my worries, and especially my travels and research on the death and passion of Christ. I recall one of our letters was dedicated to a complete interrogation on the subject of the last part of my book *The Messenger*. Apparently, my supposed interview with Jesus of Nazareth, which forms the end of the book, had a special impact on him.

And then the autumn of 1980 arrives. In respect of the truth, my hopes to obtain some indication of the Major’s impenetrable secret have weakened. There are difficult moments when my doubts assail me with great virulence. I think my fragile enthusiasm would have experienced death by fading away, if the laconic letter—it is almost a telegram—did not arrive. My friend begs me to “drop everything and fly as far as Merida City in the state of Yucatán.” For many days—I am not going to deny it—I debate with myself in an ever sinking anguish. What must I do? Has the Major decided to talk to me with clarity? I am tempted to write to him one more time and ask for an explanation. But something holds me back. I have an intuition that this could be another test, perhaps the decisive one.

In the end, I make the decision to fly to America and I initiate endless measures to subsidize all or part of the cost of this expensive trip. Contrary to what many people think, my economic means are always scarce and a sudden jump from one side of the Atlantic to the other would end with my finances out of balance. Providentially, my friend and editor Jose Manuel Lara accepts the idea of releasing my latest books in South America. In accordance with this excuse, I land in Bogota.

This roundabout way still delays my meeting with the Major for some days; I fancy it as being extremely cautious. I am unwilling to concede the smallest breath to the secret service agents. Therefore, I announce the date and the flight number that I hope to take to Merida to the Major in a letter that precedes me.

When I complete my obligations in Columbia, I manage to cancel my commitments in Caracas and fly in the strictest incognito—via Belmopan—to the Yucatán.

As I go through customs, before I have the time to search for the Major, I put my hands in front of my mouth as I hold up a poster with my first name written on it.

The scandalous cardboard is held by a robust man with a bushy black mustache and a tanned complexion. He identifies himself as Laurencio Rodarte in the service of the Major.

“He is unable to come and welcome you,” he apologizes while fighting for my suitcase. “If you don’t mind, I will drive you to him.”

My instinct is to be distrustful. Prior to leaving the airport, I try to find out what script that individual is playing with and the reason why the Major did not arrive.

Laurencio must have picked up on my distrust. He releases the suitcase and summarily says, “The Major is ill.”

“Where can I find him?”

“I’m sorry, but I am not authorized to tell you. He sent me to pick you up and...”

“Look Laurencio,” I interrupt as I try to calm my nerves. “I don’t have anything against you. Moreover, I appreciate you coming to receive me, but if you tell me where the Major is, I can go there by my own means.”

The man is unsure.

“According to my orders...”

“Don’t worry. Tell me where the Major is waiting and I’ll go to meet him.”

My tone of voice is so firm that Laurencio stops shrugging his shoulders and rudely asks, “You know Chichén Itza?”

“Yes.”

“The Major instructed me to bring you to the Holy Water Cave.”

Laurencio points to my watch and emphasizes, “You must be there at four o’clock.”

He takes a half turn and walks out the exit. I consult the local time and confirm that I have barely two hours to reach the holy Mayan well. On other occasions, I have visited the archeological zone of the secret town of Chichén Itza, which is east of Merida, and the dense forest of the Yucatán peninsula. I also know that the two famous water caves—the sacred and the profane—are located a short distance from the city. According to archeologists, the ancient Mayans used the profane one as a natural water deposit and the holy one as a religious center for practicing human sacrifice.

When I see Laurencio drive off in a black Toyota, I allow myself to take a breath as I try to put my ideas in order. Of course, I do not delay in reproaching myself for my dry and radical

attitude towards the Major's emissary, especially when it is time to haggle with the taxi drivers who stand guard at the airport...

After no small amount of tugging and pulling, one of the chauffeurs agrees to take me there for 850 *pesos*. And now at two o'clock in the afternoon—without trying to get a snack and with my clothes soaking wet with sweat—the taxi travels along Route 180 to Chichén.

Just as he has promised, the taxi covers the 120 kilometers that separate Merida from Chichén in a little less than an hour and a half. Following a vertiginous shower at the Archeological Villa Hotel, I set out in the direction of the location the Major selected. At four o'clock on the dot, I walk behind the impressive Kukulcán pyramids and Venus' platform with nimble steps and my heart in my mouth. I enter Via Sagrada that flows precisely into a water cave and a pot, which measures almost seventy meters in diameter and forty meters deep.

Before I reach the edge of the holy well, I can distinguish two people sitting at the foot of a lush acacia with rose-colored blossoms. When they see me, one of them stands up. It is Laurencio. I reduce my steps. As he comes closer to me I feel uncontrollable waves of embarrassment. Once again, I have been mistaken.

But that feeling disappears when I see the second person. I stand there in astonishment. It is the Major, but he appears twenty years older than he was when I knew him in Villa Hermosa. He remains seated on the platform near the wall of the old sacrificial altar, observing me with a mix of emotion and incredulity. Silently, I let my camera bag slowly slip away while Laurencio helps him stand up. The Major extends his long arms and, without knowing why I am allowing myself to be dragged by my heart, we embrace.

"My dear friend," the elderly man whispers, "my dear friend..."

His piercing eyes, now sunken in a skull-like face, are moist. Something very serious in effect has undermined his old gallant figure. His body seems stooped and reduced to a bunch of bones beneath dry skin spattered with brown circles of melanin. The neglected white stubble on his face marks his decline even more.

I attempt to sketch an apology as I extend my hand towards Laurencio, but I do this without losing my smile; I beg him to forget the incident at the airport.

Leaning on my shoulder, the Major suggests that we walk a little to the park which surrounds Kukulcán Pyramid.

With shaking steps and a great many stops along the path, we approach the castle or the pyramid of the Plumed Serpent. Ever since that first day in Chichén Itza, I knew from his own lips—contrary to what I would have imagined—that his end was near. In this way, his death would establish the beginning of my work.

I also knew that, just as I had insinuated on other occasions—his "illness" was an unforeseen consequence of carrying out the secret project years ago when he was still a member of the US Air Force. I suspect he is keeping a strict account on the information that he has promised to give me because when I ask him about the project, he implores me to continue being patient and to wait a little longer.

For two days my life practically transpires in a small plant shed on the outskirts of Chichén very close to the Balankanchen water caves, where the road passes in the way to Mayan

Valladolid. This is where Laurencio and his wife came to live six years ago in order to take care of my friend.

Nor can I say that I have taken advantage of the magnificent opportunity to dive as deep as possible into the middle of the Major's past and identity. However my inquiries to various police authorities and residents of Chichén are not as productive as I hoped. With a minimum of gentleness towards my friend and on account of my incipient esteem for him, even to the extent of the promised information, I decide to suspend the timid, concealed probing. Every time I launch into a tracing operation, a feeling of repugnance towards myself ends it by hampering me. It is as if I were being a traitor...

I opt to cut out the maneuvers, promising myself that I would be implacable if it is the case that the supposed secret information reaches the end of my power.

However, thankfully those first investigations that I facilitate confirm some of the information about the Major: he is in fact of North American nationality, his passport seems in order and he used to belong to the US Air Force. Still, maybe he knows nothing. Before I return to Spain I know his true identity as well as other small details about his clean and peaceful life in the Yucatán. Because all of this is logical, it calms me and makes me trust in my curiosity and interest in the little information the Major has told me.

Before my departure, I declare, with total clarity, my intention to return to my country to the ex officer. I explain my anxiety about the deteriorating state of his health and my minor uneasiness about the circumstances, at least for me, of not obtaining the smallest clue about the suspicious secret that he says he has.

The Major asks Laurencio to bring the white envelope that lies on one of the shelves in the closet in the little salon where we are situated. With a solemn expression, he places it in my hands and states, "Here you have the first delivery. The rest will arrive when I die."

I examine the envelope with a certain nervousness.

"It is sealed," I point out. "May I open it?"

"I request that you do it far from here...Perhaps on the airplane."

As I place it between the pages of my passport, my friend adopts a very relaxed tone.

"Thank you. It is necessary for you to understand that your search begins now."

"My search? But for what?"

The Major does not respond to my questions.

"I only ask you to continue believing in me and to engage all of your heart into deciphering the code that leads you to my legacy."

"I continue without understanding."

"It is not important. Now, before you leave us, you must to promise me something."

The Major rises to his feet and I do the same. At the far end of the room, Laurencio, in his proverbial muteness, assists him with the scene.

"Promise me," intones the elderly man as he raises his right hand, "that what happens, happens and you will never reveal my identity."

Despite my growing confusion, I also raise my right hand and promise it to him with all of the solemnness I am capable of mustering.

"Thank you again," the Major murmurs as he gradually falls into the chair. "God bless you."

SPAIN

That was the second and last time I saw the Major alive. On my journey back to Spain, I hold the mysterious envelope that the American gave me in my hands as the airplane flies over the Popocatepetl Crater. To my surprise, I feel something hard inside it. My curiosity, which is hard to contain these days, overflowed so I proceed to open it as carefully as I can.

When I look inside, my disappointment is enough to provoke me to the point of cardiac arrest. It is empty! Or, better said, almost empty. A tiny key is attached to the inside of the envelope by a strip of transparent tape. Unable to restrain my disillusionment, I rip it out and pass it from one hand to the other without knowing what to think. I try to reassure myself with the most disparate arguments. But the truth—cold and naked persists right there in front of me, in the form of a key. At the maximum it measures a scant four centimeters in length. It does not have a single symbol or inscription that would permit me to make any sort of identification. It had been used, that much is clear. But where?

For hours I debate between a thousand conjectures, blending the little I had anticipated with a large maze of speculations and my own fantasies. The end result is a serious headache. ‘Here is the first delivery...’ What mystery is locked in that phrase? And most importantly, what does “the rest” consist of? The rest will arrive when I die.’ The only clear thing—or medium clear—in this entire situation I am embroiled in, is that the information (or what is in question), must have some relation to this key. But what? It is absolutely necessary for me to wait, unless I want to go crazy. And that is what I do: I wait patiently.

In the course of the spring and the summer of 1981, the letters from the Major each arrive with more and more time between them. Finally, towards the month of July, with a corresponding alarm on my part, the loyal Laurencio is put in charge of responding to my letters.

“The Major,” he reports in one of the last missives, “has entered a state of deep prostration. He can barely talk....”

Those letters augur a rapid and fatal denouement. Mentally I am even preparing for a new and final trip to the Yucatán. Beyond my sustained and undeniable interest—what I call my journalistic inclination, there prevailed, by the grace of god, a deep-rooted affection for that premature elder. God knows how much I would have liked to be with the Major at the time of his death. But fate reserved another script for me in this puzzling history. Was it coincidence? Honestly, now I do not know what to think.

The fact is that on September 7, 1981, my birthday—a new letter arrives from Chichén Itzá. In a few laconic sentences Laurencio announces:

“I have the sorrow of communicating that our mutual brother, the Major, passed away on August 28. Following his instructions, I enclose an envelope that only you must open...”

The notice does not take me by surprise, I must confess that the disappearance of my friend plunges me into a singular melancholy for several days; it is perhaps comparable to the sadness produced a year after the death of another beloved friend and teacher, Manuel Osuna. On the afternoon of the September 7, with a shrunken spirit I drive my car to the steep cliffs of Galea Point. It is there in front of the calm, blue Bay of Biscay that I pray for the Major. There amid solitude I break the wax seal on the envelope and remove its contents.

Strangely enough, contrary to how I had imagined myself weeks ago those instants of rash curiosity and insatiable interest in unraveling the Major's mystery largely pass onto a second plane. For more than two hours, the second installment, which I had so longed for, remains almost forgotten on the car seat beside me. I had truly respected that old man. But, as I say, in the end my curiosity prevails. The envelope contains two large heavy sheets of quadrille ruled paper. I immediately recognize the Major's sharp pointy handwriting.

One of the pages is a letter written on both sides of the paper. It is dated August 1980! That means—by pure deduction—that the Major had made the decision to trust me with his secret shortly after my first meeting with him on April 18, 1980. The letter, which appears to be signed with his full name, was actually a final recommendation for me to persevere on the path of honor and love towards humanity. In the last paragraph, almost as an afterthought, the Major refers to the famous second installment. He explains,

In order to obtain the desired information, the code written on the separate sheet must be deciphered.

Finally, with the prominent use of crude underlining, he requests me to make good use of this information.

My desire is that with this you can bring a little more peace to those who, like you and me, are committed to a search for The Truth.

The second page, also written by the Major, contains a total of five sentences written in English. At first glance, they seem absurd and unconnected.

Here is what he wrote:

- 1. The sentinel who holds the vigil in front of the tomb will reveal the ritual of Arlington.*
- 2. The key and the ritual will lead you to Benjamin.*
- 3. Open your eyes in front of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.*
- 4. The brother lies in rest at 44-W; the shadow of the medlar tree covers him in the late afternoon.*
- 5. The past and the future are my legacy.*

Once again, the Major seems to enjoy this game. Or is it not a game? I ask myself a thousand times why there are so many precautions and detours. If my friend is dead, it is logical that I have facilitated the delivery and the exchange of information without the need for new complications. But things are how they are and the only clear alternative is to disentangle this skein that is becoming increasingly entangled.

As the reader will expect, I spend hours glued to those five sentences. I am tempted to turn to some of my friends for help. But I restrain myself. I see myself forced to provide a precedent in the form of the long and incredible history. Besides, I am satisfied with the passing time--far from discouraging me; I adapt this affair into a personal challenge. And those who know me a little are aware that this is one of my weaknesses.

From the onset, all that is clear is that the key the Major gave me has an undoubtedly close relationship to the second sentence. This key must "lead me" or take me to Benjamin. But who or what is "Benjamin"? Again and again, for nearly three weeks I dissect the clues sentence by sentence, word by word. I perform the most ridiculous changes and permutations with the sentences, all in search of the most logical meaning. It is useless.

The ferocity of the search for the clue ends when I memorize the sentences. For that month of September and part of the next month, I live by and for that coded message. Two days pass where I wander around without any north and with a strange faraway look, practically oblivious to everything around me. My children and Raquel, in particular, suffer from my great harshness, my seemingly absurd and inexplicable mood swings, my continual depression, and even my unfair irascibility. I hope that now, when they read these lines, they will understand and forgive me.

I even consult with expert locksmiths who examine the mysterious key from all possible angles. The result is always the same: the alloy is common; the teeth are typical, everything is ordinary. However the situation starts to rub against the small desirable limits of an obsession: it cannot continue. And on a good day, I attain balance. What do I really have in my hands? What conclusions have I reached?

Unfortunately, I am limited to a pair of clues.

1a. Arlington is an American cemetery. I know it is the famous cemetery for that nation's war heroes.

I research as much as I can and confirm the fact that in the aforementioned place there is a tomb which holds the remains of an unknown soldier. By pure logical deduction, the said tomb is guarded or watched by some guard of honor. Could this be what the Major refers to as a "sentinel"?

2a. President Kennedy is also buried at the Arlington National Cemetery.

But why must I "open my eyes" in front of John Fitzgerald Kennedy? These are the only points in common I am capable of uniting.

The sentinel who holds the vigil in front of the tomb will reveal the ritual of Arlington.

This first sentence turns me upside down. I am not awake enough to realize one of the pieces of a clue resides in the word "ritual." The proof of this is that the Major had repeated it in the second sentence. What is this ritual? Why must it be the sentinel who reveals it to me? Is he the one I have to ask? But, if so, who is going to show up? There was no turning back: the first step has to be the deciphering of the damned ritual. Only then will I know—at the moment this is what I think—what or who is "Benjamin." As for the last two sentences of the code, I honestly can temporarily do without them.

I come just short of calling my good friend Chenchó Arias, who nowadays is the director of the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. With total security and a favor from his contacts in Washington, he would have opened part of the road for me. However, I think about it twice and park that idea. After all, there are still four more sentences for me to clarify...

There is no other solution: I must fly to the United States and face the problem like a naked body.

WASHINGTON D.C. II

At 11:50 am on Sunday October 11, Flight 903 of the American company TWA takes off from the airport at Barajas and reaches a cruising altitude of 33,000 feet in a little more than sixteen minutes. Our next stop—New York—is at the end of thousands of miles. I have plenty of time for devising a strategy to follow once I am in Washington D.C., as well as to savor a cold beer and exchange impressions with friends and colleagues who occupy a good part of the aircraft. It is peculiar. Simply incredible...

These days, while I am squeezing my brain and struggling to extract meaning from the Major's enigmatic code, another event comes to entangle me in still more things. In a splendid article on ABC, the writer Torcuato Luca de Tena offers the Spanish the scoop on the fantastic discoveries about the eyes of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City. It is like a gunshot. This new "bait" at 10,000 kilometers precipitates my decision to jump to the American continent again.

This doubly justifies my trip. However, for the umpteenth time, I have to face the forever prosaic but inevitable topic of money. My plan is clear: go to Washington first, then Mexico. This time, there is no obstacle, fortune smiles on me quickly. It is fortune, is it not? The case is, before things can become complicated, the existence of a providential telephone call from Madrid, brings me up to date with the imminent trip from San Sebastian de los Reyes Madrid Metropolitan (SSMM) to the United States. I have accompanied Don Juan Carlos and Doña Sophia on other visits to the States. I know it is an opportunity I do not want to let get away. Among other important reasons, this type of trip is always very accessible to the modest economic means of profession journalists. So this is how on October 11, 1981, in the company of thirty Spanish journalists, a second TWA jet, Flight 407—brings me to the national airport in the capitol of the United States. It is 5:58 pm, which is the local time in Washington, D.C.

I must delay the weight of my increasing restlessness, nervousness and anxiety about my visit to the Arlington National Cemetery until tomorrow, which is Monday. During the month of October, the cemetery for American heroes closes its gates at five o'clock. I use fatigue from the journey as a cover to decline the invitation from my close friends Jaime Peñafiel, Giani Ferrari and Alberto Schommer, to see the city, and lock myself—lime and song—into Room 549 in the Hotel Marriott, which is the general headquarters and barracks for the Spanish press. I assume they are far from knowing the true objectives for my trip.

I remain bottled-up until the high hours of earlier risers, working on a possible "plan of attack." It is said in passing, that a plan always ends with experimenting with sensitive variations. But I try to do it in parts.

On the following day, October 12t, at nine o'clock in the morning with my camera on my shoulder and the innocent air of a lost tourist, I approach the temporary office of the Visitor's Center located at the gates of the Arlington National Cemetery. There a friendly civil servant with a map in her hand, points out a much shorter road to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. A light, fresh breeze off of the Potomac River begins to sway the branches of the spruce and poplar trees that line both sides of McClellan Drive. A few minutes later I am trembling with emotion as I discern Wheton and Otis Squares and immediately behind them, the tomb, which is doubtlessly the one referred to in the message from my friend the Major.

Although the cemetery has opened its gates for barely an hour, there is already a large group of tourists forming a chain that cuts off the small explanation about the huge grey tombstones found in the grand white marble mausoleum where one American soldier rests who fell on the battlefields in Europe. The other two tombs, which are located inside the mausoleum, to the right and left, hold the remains of two unknown soldiers from the Second World War and the Korean War, respectively.

Here is the sentinel; according to my information from the Visitor's Center, it is the only one from the mounted guard, which permanently resides at Arlington.

*The sentinel who holds the vigil in front of the tomb will
reveal the ritual...*

My first minutes in front of the tomb are an indescribable mix of stunned confusion and an absurd rush to assimilate everything that surrounds me.

And there, in the middle of this mental chaos, is the Major's first sentence:

The sentinel who holds the vigil...

After two hours of observing with a clear mind, I take out my captain's log book and begin frantically taking notes on everything I am capable of perceiving.

*The sentinel, who is the central point of my investigations,
is relieved every hour. This is significant: 60 minutes...*

The truth is I am resigning myself to writing down many observations that seem ridiculous to me. But I am not in the condition to disparage even the most insignificant details. I also make an exhaustive description of the guard's clothing:

*Dark blue jacket, almost black; equally blue pants (somewhat
lighter) with a yellow stripe down the sides, eight
silver buttons, white gloves and a black service cap.
There is a rifle with a scoop bayonet on the guard's
shoulder...*

I observe

I continue noting,

*that when the sentinel arrives at the end of the short and martial
march next to the tombs, the weapon is always switched to
the other shoulder. Curiously, the gun never faces
of the mausoleum.*

But what does seeing all of this have to do with the damned ritual?

The soldier's short walk in front of the tomb occurs silently and monotonously. It is clear that the sentinel is not able to talk. This is easy to understand, I do not have any illusions in respect to the remote possibility of interrogating the sentinel about "the ritual of Arlington." In the first sentence of the secret code, the Major does not affirm that the said soldier could verbally

transmit the cited ritual to me. The expression "will reveal to you" can be interpreted in very different ways, however almost on principle I can rule out a hypothetical dialog with a member of the Old Guard. The secret must be in another place. Surely, considering a ritual is a ceremony, it must have the concentrated strength of all those concerned with it.

Because it is so boring and because I do not want to arouse any suspicion about my prolonged presence in the amphitheatre's square, I divide the morning and part of the afternoon between the area around the Unknown Soldier, which is always crowded, and the memorial stone for the ill-fated President Kennedy, which is located a little more than 300 kilometers on the eastern skirt of the slope that exactly intersects the three tombs of the Unknown American Soldiers.

Open your eyes in front of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, I recite the third sentence of the message.

But however wide I open my eyes, my mind continues to be white. I inclusively add the numbers of the dates of his birth and death (1917-1963) without obtaining any result. By pure inertia, I play with the President's age, forming an infinite number of kabala's as absurd as they are sterile. I believe the only positive outcome from those long hours in front of Kennedy's tomb and that of his two sons, who died before him, is the Lord's Prayer that I let fall out silently as a modest recognition for his work.

By three o'clock, in the afternoon I am hungry and half-defeated. I let myself collapse on the neat white staircase of the tiny amphitheater that rises in front of the three tombs. In my notebook I am so plagued with numbers, commentaries, drawings of the twelve sentinels I saw marching, that at the moment there is only space for the disillusionment.

I think I am going to faint

I write.

I am not sufficiently intelligent for this...

After one of those monotonous pauses, sentinel number six moves the rifle to his opposite shoulder and resumes his march. In the stupidest way, probably inspired by their shiny boots, I commence counting each one of his strides to a tempo which coincides with insults which reward my proven ineptitude. ...Three (idiot)...four (imbecile)...seven (ninny)..twenty (fool)...twenty-one (dupe).

The soldier halts. He pauses again. He turns. He changes the position of the gun. He pauses again. And he continues his march.

Two (dimwit)...four (jackass)...twelve (calamity)...twenty (paranoid)...twenty-one...
Twenty-one? The last insult is replaced by a shudder. Have I counted correctly?

The sentinel has taken 21 steps. I am weakening until I fade away. I stand up and resume counting.

....nineteen, twenty, and twenty-one!

I have not made a mistake. This new track makes me breathe with enthusiasm. How did I get that amount before?

With my watch in my hand, I advance towards the security chain and measure the time the soldier takes for each motion.

Twenty-one seconds! Twenty-one steps and twenty-one seconds?

I do a new test and everything—absolutely everything throws out identical results.

What does this signify? Is it a matter of coincidence?

Spoiled by my own love, I propose counting even the most insignificant of the sentinel's movements.

It is when I count the time the soldier spends in each one of the pauses, that my heart starts accelerating. 21 seconds!

It cannot be, I say to myself as I tremble with emotion. Surely I am wrong.

But, no. It is as though they try to act like robots, the sentinel walks 21 steps taking 21 seconds to do it. The soldier halts exactly 21 seconds, turns and switches the position of the weapon. The new pause, taken before the soldier continues marching, lasts for another 21 seconds and so on, successively.

I note "my" discovery and re-read the Major's code with a special delight.

*The sentinel who holds the vigil in front of the
tomb will reveal the ritual of Arlington.*

No, it cannot be a coincidence, I obsessively repeat to myself. But why 21? What does the number 21 signify?

In the end, I make sure: I wait for the last changing of the guard and repeat the calculations. Soldiers number eight and nine behave exactly the same.

I am engrossed with the code to the extent of almost being locked inside the cemetery.

With a strange happiness, I return to my refuge in the hotel as I sum up an endless number of ruminations.

The next morning, after a night practically on a vigil, I join the party of journalists. However, my thoughts continue to focus on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the mysterious number 21. I decide to take advantage of the one time opportunity to visit the interior of the White House and contemplate near President Regan, Secretary of State Haig and, I suppose, the kings from my country.

At ten o'clock on the dot, coinciding with the arrival of Dan Juan Carlos and Doña Sofia, the batteries which are about a hundred meters away, stun the space with organized salvos.

Someone behind me is keeping count of the salute and makes a comment for which I never can thank him sufficiently.

"Twenty and twenty-one!"

I turn like I move by a spring and ask, "What is 21?"

The journalist stares me in the eye and declares as if he is in front of a stupid ignoramus, "It is the ritual salute...21 salvos."

I return to the Marriott ready to resolve my doubts with the stroke of a pen. I pick up the telephone. I dial 6931174 and ask for Mr. Wilton, who is in charge of Press and Public Relations at the Arlington National Cemetery. The good man will be astonished when he hears my problem.

"Look, Sir, I am a Spanish journalist and I want to ask you if the number 21 has a relation to some ritual..."

"Are you referring to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier?"

"Yes."

"Effectively," Mr. Wilton explains, "the ritual of Arlington is based exactly on that number. As you know, the salute for the highest dignitaries is based on the number 21."

"Excuse my insistence, but are you sure?"

"Of course."

When he hangs up the phone, it makes me want to jump and shout. I open my notebook and revise the Major's code. Yes, the ritual of Arlington is the number 21, the second sentence--*the key and the ritual will lead you to Benjamin*--I start to have a certain feeling. It is evident that my key and the number 21 have a close relation and if I am capable of discovering who or what is "Benjamin," part of the mystery remains to be discovered.

But where should I begin?

By a good law, this small key has to open something. Maybe it opens a home? But its diminutive size does not seem to match the keys they are accustomed to using for American houses. I discard that possibility, momentarily and focus on more logical ideas. Could the Major have kept the information in some bank or in a post office box? Alternatively, did he use a locker at one of the luggage services in a train station?

I only have one way to decipher "Benjamin" : I arm myself with patience and I check the addresses and train stations in Washington, D.C. one by one with a telephone book. If my first exploration fails, in time I must go deeply in the other direction.

But this laborious search is suddenly suspended by a telephone call. The weight of my intense dedication to the American Major's affair has not made me forget the subject of NASA's fascinating discoveries about the Virgin of Guadalupe. No sooner than I step into the United States, one of my first concerns is to call Mexico and ascertain whether Dr. Aste Tonsmann, one of the most distinguished experts, is in Mexico City or if, as they informed me in Spain, I could

meet him in New York where he works as a professor at Cornell University. It is vital for me to find him, so my trip to the Mexican republic does not turn out to be a pail.

That same morning of Tuesday October 13, I implore the hotel's telephone operator to persist and dial the telephone number for Dr. Tonsmann's home a third time. It is already the middle of the afternoon, as I said, the operator's amiable warning disrupts all of my plans. At the other end of the telephone line, José Aste's wife confirms that the scientist is expected to return to Mexico from New York next Wednesday or Thursday.

After some doubts, I take on a practical feeling and estimate that the best opportunity is to freeze my investigations in Washington. Tonsmann is an integral piece in my second project and I cannot waste his fleeting stay in Mexico. After all, I am the only one who possesses the key to the Major's secret and that gives me a certain feeling of tranquility.

And before I can regret it, I pack my suitcases and board Easter Lines Flight 905 with stops in Atlanta and Mexico City. On Wednesday October 14, 1981 I begin my second adventure which months later, will end up reflected in my fourteenth book: *The Mystery of Guadalupe*.

I am used to these things happening...

I have stayed in front of President Kennedy's tomb for hours, incapable of observing the secret in the third sentence of the Major's code.

Open your eyes in front of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Well my eyes are good and open at an altitude of 10,000 meters and when I am thousands of kilometers away from Washington D.C. Meanwhile, as the jet flies towards Atlanta, which is our first stop, it occurs to me to insert the number 21 into the last three sentences of the message.

I must have changed color, because the beautiful flight attendant from Easter points to the cup of coffee which oscillates on the edge of my lips, leans over the back of my seat and comments, "Don't you like the coffee?"

"Pardon..."

"I am asking you if you are finding everything good."

"Ah!" I reply, returning to reality. "Yes, I am perfectly fine.... The problem is the number 21..."

The flight attendant looks up and examines my seat number.

"No, I apologize," I offer with the intent of avoiding having this dialog for sea breezes end up as something even worse. "It's just that my last dream was about the number 21..."

The woman sketches an accommodating smile and places her hand on my shoulder as she makes a judgment.

"Have you been trying to play the lottery?"

Then she vanishes down the aisle, convinced, I suppose—that the world is full of lunatics.

For an instant, the flight attendant's long legs succeed in pulling me out of my thoughts. I finish the coffee and continue counting the letters in the fallen American President's name. There is no doubt. They add up to 21!

This second discovery, particularly the fact that they both point towards the number 21—confirms my initial suspicions. The Major must have kept his secret in some deposit box or site narrowly connected to the code and obviously linked to the key he gave me in Chichén Itzá. I also consider the possibility that "Benjamin" is some family member or friend of the Major. However, if that were the case, what picture is painted by all of the business with the number and the key?

During my prolonged stay in Mexico, I try to bring my investigation about the Virgin of Guadalupe to a new level before returning to the Yucatán in order to visit Laurencio. However, the fact that my economic resources have diminished at a very alarming rate weighs me down. If I truly want to complete my investigation in Washington, I have to stop and postpone the visit to Chichén to a better occasion.

A year later in December 1982, when I returned to Mexico to present my book *The Mystery of the Virgin of Guadalupe*, I confirmed, much to my amazement, that a trip to the Yucatán during those dates would have been unproductive: the local authorities verified that Laurencio and his wife left Chichén Itzá shortly after the Major passed away. Nonetheless, I did not relent in my effort to find them. To this moment, I am without any news of the former Air Force officer's loyal companion. Needless to say, my first steps in the winter of 1982 were to make my way to the site of my friend's grave. There, in front of a modest wooden cross, I held my last conversation with the Major. I expressed my gratitude to him for placing his greatest and most precious treasure in my hands...

When I touch down in Washington, D.C. again, my first concern is not "Benjamin." As I sit on the bed in the room in my new hotel—which on this occasion is much more modest than the Marriott—I lay out all of my capital on the bedspread. After a thorough itemization, my reserves amount to 75 dollars and 1500 *pesetas*.

Although the tragedy seems inevitable, I am not discouraged by the cruel reality. I still have credit cards...

Nowadays, I limit my diet to one breakfast—as hearty as possible and a sandwich with a glass of milk at the usual hour. The truth is, since I am so immersed in the investigation and since, I am not a man of large appetites, the thing is not excessively painful. Although it seems like a lie, my grand obsession is taxis. Yes, I reduce that one—and in what way—my meager economic chapter.

The key and the ritual lead you to Benjamin.

The second sentence of the Major's secret code is a cross that torments me for four days. This time, just as I anticipated before leaving Washington, D.C., I employ body and soul in checking telephone books for the U.S. capitol and guides to train stations, post offices, the Dulles and national airports, that were written for visiting correspondents.

The baggage services at the train stations are crossed off my list when I see the obvious difference between the keys they use in their depots and the one in my possession. For their part, airports lack similar lockers, so that is why my interest in them ends and becomes centered on

bank security deposit boxes and post office boxes. At this time, these last two alternatives seem the most logical for holding “something” of value...

So I start with the banks. I review the long list of one hundred main and branch offices of financiers in the city. I do not discover a single clue that mentions or references the name “Benjamin.”

However, according to my personal verification, if the Major has locked his information in a safe deposit box at one of the banks, I, nor anyone else will be able to access it without having arranged the corresponding documentation certifying that one is a legitimate owner or user of the box. In some cases, medium security is reinforced by the existence of a second key in the possession of a responsible person or by the presence of the bank's vigilant hidden camera. Nevertheless, I hurry to the last duplicate investigation. I know the Major's identity and I begin pressing a series of springs and contacts at the level of the Spanish Embassy and even the Pentagon—for the purpose of clarifying if the deceased American soldier has any surviving relatives in Washington D.C. Judging by what happens two days later, this, to every light, is my greatest indiscretion...

On the second front, the grace of the gods concedes a major dedication involving my inspection of the addresses for the two central and fifty-eight branch post offices in the city. At the U.S. Postal Service Headquarters, which is a central brain that serves all of the other post offices in the country, a friendly civil servant hands me the long list of the post offices located in Washington, D.C.

As I search for some indication of the recalcitrant name "Benjamin", I am hit in the face by the first entry before my eyes can look at the first branch. I jump. The following entry appears in the list:

*Box No. 1-999 Benjamin Franklin Station
Pennsylvania Avenue (Washington D.C. 20044)*

I write down the information without being able to prevent my hands from shaking due to a mix of nervousness and emotion. In my search for a way to calm myself, I light a new cigarette. I must be absolutely sure that this is the desired trail. I examine the sixty addresses with a meticulousness not even I can explain to myself.

To my surprise, I discover that the name Benjamin Franklin is repeated three more times in entries 14, 19 and 33. The remainder of the post offices in Washington, D.C. do not contain the name Benjamin Franklin. But I have no way of reaching an understanding of why there are four post offices on the same street with the name Benjamin Franklin. In the one located at number 14, the heading lists the numbers 6100-6199. For the one at position 19 on the list, the digits 7100-7999 appear on the record. The last one, number 33, is preceded by the range 14001-14999. Again I make my way to the clerk and ask her to explain the significance of the numbering. Her absolute, concise reply dissipates my doubts.

"There are four sections corresponding to the different post office boxes. The first one, on the list you saw, has boxes with numbers between 1 and 999 inclusive..."

I suppose to this very day, a postal employee has not received a "Thank you" as happy and effusive as mine...I leap down the gigantic steps to the Post Office three at a time and zoom like a meteor into the first taxi I see. It is 4:30 pm on November 4, 1981.

As I approach Pennsylvania Avenue, ready to utilize this gust of good luck, I return to the Major's code. Now I begin to see clearly. The key and the "ritual", which is to say, the number 21—leads me to Benjamin.

By coincidence, out of the 60 post offices in all of Washington, D.C. only one has the name Benjamin and curiously in that one—and only in that one branch can there be found a P.O. Box with the number 21. If we have a total of sixty post offices in 1981 and more than 24,000 post office boxes, what conclusion can you reach?

But halfway there, my joy sees itself in a well. I forgot the key at the hotel! In this case, my Franciscan prudence plays a bad trick on me. I consult the time. I do not have the time to return to the hotel and then leave for the post office. In an bad mood, I enter the post office prepared to at least take a look at it.

I ask for the stamp vendor and with the excuse of writing some postcards, I prowl through the immense, brightly lit rooms for a little more than fifteen minutes. On the first floor, hundreds of little metal doors, with their corresponding numbers, are embedded in a wall of black marble in straight lines. They are 12 centimeters long. Here is my objective.

Fortunately for me, the transience of the citizens is such that the police officer who patrols the first floor does not detect my movements. Before I leave the post office, I make a quick inspection of the banks of post office boxes. I pause for a few seconds in front of box number 21. For a moment I have the sensation that I am the white target at the center of a bull's eye that tens of gazes fix upon. Since it is small, the lock's keyhole seems to match the key I have...

As I set out again on the road to the hotel, I realize I am still holding the postcards in my sweaty hands. Neither Ana Benítez, nor my parents, neither Alberto Schommer, nor Raquel, neither Castillo, nor Gloria de Larrañaga will ever receive those souvenirs.

This afternoon in a final effort to relax, I go to the Space Museum on Jefferson Drive. In spite of the imminent and apparently easy final phase of the search for the Major's information, my doubts are getting worse. What if I am wrong? What if the post office box is not what I am searching for with such fervor?

The truth is I am arriving at the limit of my possibilities. These—I am sure—are my last hours in the U.S. If I cannot solve the dilemma, I ought to forget the affair for a long time. I sit in the museum's hall with an anguish capable of killing a horse. I lack someone to share the tension of these moments. There is a long line of tourists and curious people in the center of the room patiently waiting for their turn to pass in front of a display case which exhibits a fragment of lunar rock no larger than a cigarette. A second much smaller piece has been embedded in the bottom of a display case. It is as if it is a sacred relic, when each visitor walks in front of the display, they pass their fingers over the black and dinghy stone.

By pure inertia, I open my notebook and begin describing as much as I observe. And naturally I end it by falling on the subject of the Major's code. But this time I linger over the original version in English.

My bad habit of underlining, drawing and outlining in books or handwritten notes is a way of shaking off this profound melancholy.

In reality, I begin everything as a game; as a simple and unconscious alleviation of the tension I bear.

I know from many people, that when they talk on the telephone, meditate or simply converse, they accompany their words or thoughts with the most absurd drawings, lines, circles, etc. sketched on whatever sheet of paper. Very good, as I say, in those instants I dedicate myself to making some of the words from each of the five sentences of the coded message fit without order or harmony.

Fortune—or is it luck—wants one to draw a rectangle around the first words of each of the five sentences in the code. As I continue following this pastime, I entertain myself by crossing out the other words with many vertical lines.

When I read from the top to the bottom of these lines, it is apparently gibberish: one of the absurd constructions which leaves me stoned. The first words from each of the five sentences, read in this vertical way, hold some significance!

The key opens the past.

I generate the rest of the sentences this way, but they don't have any meaning.

Before pronouncing the new clue good, I review the message again, outlining the words on top and bottom left, right and even diagonally. But it is useless. The only ones that spin off something coherent are --"coincidentally" -- the first five words...The guard--reads the message in English--*who keeps the vigil in front of the Tomb, will reveal the ritual of Arlington Cemetery to you.*

Key and the ritual lead you to Benjamin.

Open your eyes in front of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

The brother lies in rest in 44-W.; the shadow of the medlar tree covers him in the late afternoon.

The past and the future are my legacy.

What had the Major wanted to say with this sixth clue? Intuitively I join the new sentence with the last one in the message:

The past and future are my legacy.

What relation can exist between the key, the past, and the future?

Cheered by this sudden discovery, however impotent in clearing up so much mystery—I recognize it. I prepare to wait for the first light of this Thursday, which appears to be particularly intense.

On Thursday, November 5, 1981 I alight in front of the Benjamin Franklin branch of the post office; I notice that my knees are buckling. My right hand closes like a trap holding the little key the Major presented to me in the Yucatán. The key appears lightly tarnished by inconvenience and my cold sweat. I am profoundly inspired. I cross the threshold with determined steps, heading towards the wall where the hive of metallic pigeonholes shines.

It is a success without a doubt. I wait until the clock reads ten o'clock in the morning. At that moment tens of people are absorbed in their own affairs in different departments of the post office. Once I am standing in front of box Number 21, a large group of citizens—especially elderly ones—proceed to open their respective post office boxes totally indifferent to their surroundings.

I move the key to my left hand and, with a mechanical gesture, wipe the increasing sweat on my palm off on my grey corduroy pants. I resume breathing as deeply as possible, retrieve the little key and bring it trembling towards the lock. But my nerves betray me. Before I can even try to see if the key will or will not fit in the hole, it falls out of my fingers to the polished white tile floor. It clinks on the floor as it makes multiple rebounds on the paving. I go pale. I launch myself like a robot after the damned key, furious with myself for being so clumsy. Yet when I am ready to pick it up, a long sure hand gets to it before me. As I raise my eyes, a thread of fire perforates my stomach. The obliging individual is one of the security guards employed by the post office. Silently, with an open smile for all commentary, the police officer extends his hand and gives the key to me. The gods know, I want the circumstances where I accompany that gesture with a working smile, without even opening my lips, and I take a half turn in the direction of box 21.

Now I tremble when I think of what could have happened if that representative of the law had asked me any question...With dread still in my body, I test the keyhole with the tip of the key. My heart jumps without piety. Please; enter...! Enter! Sweetly, as if I hear it, the key penetrates my head. I feel like screaming. It has entered! In reality, no: my right hand has grasped the key. It is my heart, my brain and all of my being...

Before proceeding, I cautiously look left and right. Everything seems normal. I swallow saliva and I attempt to open it. As much as I turn on the outside, the metal door does not respond. I feel like another wave of blood hits my stomach. What is happening? The key entered into the lock. So why does not it continue and open the post office box?

In the midst of so much nervousness and confusion, I comprehend that I am forcing the lock in only one direction: the left. Then I turn it to the right and the small door opens with a slight squeak. I am pleased at being able to stop time. After so many sacrifices, headaches and so much anguish, here I am at 10:15 am on Thursday, November 5, 1981 on the point of elucidating "The Major's Mystery." At this moment, it still seems so incredible that before I proceed with the exploration of the box, I do regret that I do not have my camera. However, an element of prudence made me leave my equipment at the hotel.

I stretch out my hand and feel the pigeonhole's metallic surface. In the midst of the dimness, I discern the presence of a pair of packages. They are sitting at the bottom of the narrow rectangle. Once I touch them, I identify them as some sort of tubes or cylinders. I remove one and see that it is a type of cardboard roll about thirty centimeters long. It is perfectly and solidly protected by a layer of plastic or plasticized paper. It is very lightweight. No names or inscription appears on it, with the exception of a small numeral (a "1") written by hand in black on a little white label, which is glued or taped over one of the circular ends of the cylinder. As I said, all of it is beneath a brilliant plastic material which is very carefully stuck to the roll.

I hastily grab the second roll. It is another cylinder, identical to the first one, but with a “2” on one of its ends. Suddenly I begin to experience a strange urgency. I have the sensation that I am being observed. But I control the desire to turn around and put my hand in the box as I make a third search. Then my fingers bump into an envelope. I place it in the mouth of the niche. Before leaving, I confirm that the compartment is left totally clean. I cast my hands over the mailbox’s sides, top and bottom. Once I am convinced that box number 21 is completely empty, I seize the white envelope and, without even looking at it, I close the door. Trying to appear natural, I put away the key and walk towards the branch’s exit.

For a moment I feel like running. But I am losing strength due to emaciation, so I stop in the middle of the street. The truth is that nothing appears suspicious. I pledge one of my last ducats and make the most of that pretend excuse to go back. The truth is, I didn’t want to arouse any suspicions. The intense manner of being careful is slowly diminishing. However, I still observe small groups in front of the marble tables, at various counters and next to the banks of post office boxes. Something makes me feel calmer. I suppose my presentiment could have been on account of my excitement at crossing the corridor and walking away from the post office.

Three quarters of an hour later, I hang the “Do Not Disturb” sign on the doorknob of the door to my room. I place both rolls on the small glass table that serves as my desk, and take a couple of steps back. I have achieved it. For several minutes, I hold the envelope in my hands and enjoy the spectacle. I cannot even guess what the cardboard cylinders contain, but then for those moments that is the least of it.

I have achieved it! I have utilized everything well: time, money, loneliness...

I let the envelope fall on the floorboards and it is as if there were a movie, which recorded the steps I made in these preceding months, playing before me. But finally my curiosity imposes itself and I tear open the envelope. The outside of the envelope does not have a single word or symbol on it. As soon as I take out the sheet of paper, the contents are identified by the Major’s pointy, agitated handwriting.

It is dated April 7, 1979 in Washington, D.C. In the letter, he simply states that his brother from the “grand journey” had died two years ago and that he is following the impulse of his own conscience. On that day April 7, 1979, he considered the diary of the trip finished.

The brief message ends with the following words:

*I only ask the gods for our sacrifices to be known
some day, for them to bring peace to all people
of goodwill in the same way that my brother...
and I had the grace to encounter.*

At the foot of the note, the Major requests the person who has access to the diary and the note, to respect the anonymity of both of them.

For this reason, the Major suppresses the identity of the person he calls his “brother.” I can clarify that in reality it is not a matter of a blood brother, but a qualification which is purely spiritual...

As I read the obituary, my first reaction is to consult the code. This confession of the death of a USAF officer seems like a perfect fit to the fourth and no less mysterious sentence:

*The brother lies in rest at 44-W.; the shadow of
the medlar tree covers him in the late afternoon.*

Yet again, the name Arlington sprouts in me...

Yes, now it makes sense, I say to myself. Now I begin to understand: I have to visit the cemetery again... In reality, the how and why can be verified by reading the Major's diary; those last two sentences of the code are nothing but a confirmation that one has reached his legacy—namely the physical reality of this companion on the "grand journey" and, obviously, the aforementioned diary.

In honor of the truth, after I knew the incredible information enclosed in the cylinders, none of it was vital to locating my friend's deceased companion. However, those who know me a little know I like to exhaust an investigation, with the highest motive as well, especially if, as in these moments, I find myself so close to the end.

But the surprises have not ended on this indelible Thursday... Before I proceed with the solemn opening of the cardboard cylinders, I arrange the envelope next to the cylinders and photograph them to my content. Act two: after confirming that the protective plastic does not offer even the smallest gap for beginning the task of extraction, I take out one of my shaving blades and delicately separate the circle that covers one of the cylinder's ends. Precisely the opposite face presents a small label with the number "1."

Nervously, I palpate the carton. It seems very solid. Following a complete scrutiny—I would almost dare to call it a microscopic examination; I see that I must slit it along the circumference. One hour later, the stubborn lid (5 millimeters thick and 10 centimeters in diameter), jumps off the end, allowing the discovery of the tube's interior.

Seconds later, there is a small bundle of perfectly rolled papers in front of me. It had been inserted into the bottom of the transparent plastic and hermetically sealed at the top. I use the small fingernail clipper to pop off twenty-seven staples. With an excitement difficult to describe, I cut the first flap of the documents and verify that they are typed single spaced on what we know as bible paper. Each one a of a total of 250 folios, sized 20centimeters x 31centimeters, has been signed and sealed on the bottom left corner by the Major. It is the same handwriting—and I would say the same ink-- that appears at the foot of the letter I removed from post office box number 21 when I finished opening it.

Although the text is written in English, I snatch its meaning the moment I fix my eyes on it. And believe I would not have been unstuck from reading it had it not been for that unexpected telephone call...

Thirteen hours had passed, and as I say, the telephone in my room rings and brings me back to cruel reality.

"Mr. Benítez...?"

"I am he...Talk to me."

"Two men are here asking for you...They are here..."

"Two men?" I ask in my turn, feeling disconcerted before the sudden visit. "Who are they?"

"One moment," the hotel employee says doubtfully. "I don't know..."

Who would be interested in seeing me? In fact, I think with a strange presentiment, who knows I am in Washington?

"One of them claims to be from the FBI," the receptionist announces in a few seconds.

"Ah!" I exclaim in a thready voice. "Good...I'm coming down right now..."

It is all happening so fast and unforeseen that shortly after hanging up the receiver, I begin to go pale. It is neither logical nor normal for the FBI to be interested in me. What could have occurred? What new bundle have I gotten myself into?

Instantly, I remember. A few days back, I committed the blunder of taking an interest in the Spanish Embassy and the Pentagon during the search for the Major's possible relations. Meanwhile, I suddenly notice the cylinders and the envelope. With a whirlwind of fear, hypothesis and counterhypothesis muddling my brain still more, I hide them in the bottom of my camera bag. With the key to my room still in my hands and dying of fear, I enter the hallway.

Two individuals, with strong constitutions and immaculate suits rise out of the large armchairs located in front of the elevator door. I don't even have the opportunity to show myself to reception and inquire about my unusual visitors.

One of them walks over to me with a little forced smile and his hand extended,

"Mr. Benítez?"

First, as he introduces himself he squeezes my hand so hard, my voice seems to rise to the level of a singer, and then he invites me to sit down with them.

"Don't worry," he announces with an evident desire to calm me. "This is about a simple routine matter..."

I also force a smile as I ask them for identification.

"On the telephone," I add, "they said that one of you is an FBI agent. May I see your credentials?"

Instantly, as if this demand of mine forms a part of an equally routine and habitual ceremony, both of them take black plastic cards out of their inside jacket pockets. First of all, their affiliation had been identifiable by nothing more than me seeing them in the hallway. I can read the prominent characters above the rest, the words 'Federal Bureau of Investigation.' That, in effect corresponds to the famous acronym FBI or Federal Office of Investigation.

On the second identification, which is not removed from my sight with such rapidity as that of the first FBI agent, for a change I can read the following:

Department of State Office of Press

And something like an address: 2200 C Street ... (Washington D.C.) and a number which starts with (202) 632...

"Thank you," I reply with more fear. "Well, you tell me."

"We know who you are and we also know your situation as a Spanish journalist," responds the member of the FBI as he opens a small notebook and kindly refuses one of my cigarettes. "And we know that this past Tuesday morning at 11:15 am, you communicated an interest in possible relatives of the Major..."

Fuck, what uncles! I think to myself. What an information service!

"Good. Well..." the agent proceeds as he points to the notes that appear in his book, "In the first place we want to find out if this information is correct."

"Effectively, it is..."

"In that case, we would like to know why you have this interest in the Major's family."

My brain is alert for a reason. Tell me, I say to myself. Out of fear it is searching for the answers with a coldness that still frightens me.

"Very well. It is an old story. I met the Major on one of my trips to Mexico and began a sincere friendship with him. We wrote to each other and after a few months," I lie, "when I visited that country again, I learned that he had died."

I hold the Yankee's confused gaze without blinking. Perhaps they were waiting for another version and on verifying what I said, which is partly true. He appears indecisive. That is his first mistake. Before they can formulate a new question, I take advantage of those seconds and seize the initiative.

"You also know that I am a writer about and an investigator of the UFO phenomena."

The agent smiles.

"On a particular occasion," I continue improvising, "the Major gave me the understanding that he knew certain information related to this subject. And he gave me the name of a friend who resides in the United States... He would tell me the information only if I knew why and how to wait, then the Major died... My interlocutor, why and how I wanted, bit the fish hook."

"Can you tell us the name of that person?"

I feign reluctance and add, "The truth is, I don't like to prejudge anyone..."

"Don't worry..."

"It's okay. I don't have any objection to giving you the name of the person you seek, as long as you stay on the sidelines and answer a question..."

The two characters exchange a look of complicity and the employee of the Department of State, who has not opened his mouth up to that moment, ask at his turn, "What is this about?"

"Could you provide us with a clue about the member of the Major's family or his friend that you are attempting to locate?"

Before his companion gives me time to respond, the FBI agent intervenes again.

"Done. Tell us, what is the name of the person who you must contact?"

As he writes down the first and last name of the Major's "brother of the journey," the agent hesitates and exchanges a fleeting look with his partner. That is his second mistake. This almost imperceptible vacillation ends up alerting me. For the first time—in that instant—I begin to be conscious that I had ventured into an extremely dangerous affair. Those individuals—who were jumping at my visit—knew much more than they were saying. But that is not the worst of it. The drama is that by the synchronicities of destiny, I have in my power information that is starting to burn my hands and for which the United States Intelligence services are capable of doing anything.

"And what is this clue?" I press, simulating an air of satisfaction.

The FBI agent remains silent. After writing something on one of the pages in his notebook, he tears it out a page and places it in my hands.

"This is all we can tell you," he mumbles reluctantly. "We believe this is one of the Major's relatives..."

I can read the name of a city in New York and two last names on the paper.

I fake a certain annoyance.

"But you can't tell me more than this?"

The individuals rise to their feet, wish me luck and move towards the exit. Without wishing to, those "gorillas" have given me the best excuse for leaving Washington at full speed.

Before returning to my room, I decide to look outside. I see how the agents enter a metallic blue car about twenty or thirty meters from where I found them. I am concealed by the revolving door. I go into the hall immediately and as I walk towards the elevator, I notice I am under the weight of the receptionist's curious gaze. Prior to locking the door to my room, I hang up the "Do Not Disturb" sign and put on the security chain. Then my knees begin shaking and I have to allow myself to fall across the bed. I suppose my perturbation is due to what they call a "delicate" visit and above all, the contents of the cylinder.

I do not know how long I stayed knocked out on the bed in the semidarkness of my room. One thing is clear, in all that I am tangled up in: now more than ever before I must act with lead feet. If the FBI has taken interest in this business, logically it is because they knew about the "grand journey" which had been achieved by the Major and his "brother." One doesn't have to be short of an eagle to perceive that the American intelligence services are not ready for that secret information to be leaked to the press.

For the moment, the Major's exquisite prudence has provided me with a definite advantage and naturally I am willing to use it. If the FBI and the State Department know very well about the two deceased USAF veterans, they can continue believing that I am only attempting to locate a "friend" of the Major; perhaps my departure from this country will be much easier than I predicted. In summary, this is the most important resolution which ends with me adopting it at noon on Thursday November 5, 1981: return to Spain immediately, with my treasure, of course.

I jump out of bed and prepare to implement the final phase of my plan: the visit to the Arlington National Cemetery. I repeat that even if the confirmation of the death of my friend's companion and "brother" does not cover anything especially important, my internal power needs to conclude the circular mystery that constitutes the code. I prepare my cameras and consult my watch. It is two o'clock in the afternoon. I still count three hours until the graveyard gates are closed to the public.

But when I am ready to abandon the room, an elemental feeling of prudence obliges me to take a look out the window. For a moment there is no reaction. But parked next to the sidewalk near the front of the hotel, in the same place I'd seen it at 1:30pm, is the metallic blue sedan. That belongs to the agents who visited me. Instinctively, I back away and close the window. It cannot be a coincidence. That is a vehicle from the FBI. It is obvious that I have underestimated the agents...

I reflect while searching for a solution; if I risk leaving now, what can happen? It fits the possibility that nothing fantastic outside of modest will follow or it can be much worse, they can take the opportunity to search my room. This last idea fills me with horror. What can I do? Neither am I resigned to stay cloistered within these four walls... Abruptly the memory of the fire escape comes to me. Yes, I say trying to animate myself, that can be my exit.

I turn on the television and endeavoring to make as little noise as possible, I slowly open the door. The corridor appears deserted. I quickly position myself at the end of the hallway in front of the emergency exit. One difference from Spanish hotels is that American hotels try to keep the door permanently open. I scout the exterior. From the metal platform or landing there is a staircase from the sixth floor where I am. I verify that this exit leads directly to a narrow street with negligible traffic. There is not a single vehicle in the vicinity. This reassures me.

In a few minutes I lock the door to my room again and prepare for the escape. It is most important not to raise suspicions. Consequently, I follow a methodical plan. I telephone room service and order a frugal lunch. I continue by undressing and putting on my pajamas. I dial the number for reception and, adopt a slow, weary tone as I explain to the employee on duty that I am very exhausted and want to sleep. Finally, after insisting that they don't let calls from anyone through, I request a wake up call at 6:30pm in the evening. If, as I suspect, those responsible for the hotel have orders to watch me and report my entrances and exits, this can be a good alibi.

Fifteen minutes later, a waiter calls at the door. He pushes in a cart with the food. After I deposit a substantial tip in his hand, I announce that I do not want to be disturbed by him returning to clear the small rolling table. I will leave it in the hallway when I wake up, I conclude. The man seems to conform to this and disappears down the corridor. Meanwhile, I turn around and hang up the "Do Not Disturb" sign.

I dress in a matter of seconds. I pinch one of the bread rolls and shoulder my camera bag in whose bottom I have packed the cardboard cylinders and the letter from the Major. My watch

reads 2:45 pm. Next I assure myself that the door to my room is perfectly locked, I put away the key and –like ghost—cover the thirty short steps which separate me from the emergency exit. Once it closes behind me, I devote a few seconds to an exhaustive exploration of the street and the stretch I must descend. I observe that everything is quiet.

Without losing a minute more, I rush down the stairs stepping on each with the point of my boot. I pause when I reach the penultimate landing. My heart does not fit in my chest... I launch a glance downwards and after my confirmation that the street is clear, I continue with excessive optimism. I made this observation, because as I face the last steps, I am on the point of smashing my noggin. I had not counted on the small-- great obstacle: the fire escape dies a considerable height above the pavement.

I lean forward and comprehend, with anguish that if I intend to keep up my escape, first I must jump these 2 or three meters. (The truth is that I never know for certain what distance I have discovered to the pavement.) I have to make it quick: return to the sixth floor or leap. My position on the final step of the fire escape is frankly compromised. Whatever pedestrian happens to pass by at this instant can discover me.

I swallow saliva and move my bag closer to my abdomen. I wrap both of my arms around it. Then in a purely unconscious act, I jump. The impact on my squat is appreciable. In my zeal to protect my photographic equipment, I lean too much to the side and roll lengthwise on the hard cement.

Rarely do I stand up with such speed. To tell the truth, my only worry is that someone may have seen me jump. But fortune still seems to be on my side. The narrow street is still deserted. I clean my sheepskin jacket with a pair of slaps and leave like a whistle towards the intersection I see at the end of the street. If everything is working according to my wishes, on the other side of the block in the direction opposite to the one I am now taking, the FBI agents continue sitting in their sedan.

Twenty minutes later, when my watch is on the point of chiming 3:30pm, a taxi leaves me on Memorial Drive at the cemetery gates. However, I did not savor my rapid displacement to Arlington-- the weight of my constant glances was backwards as we might be followed by the fearsome blue vehicle. On this new visit to the cemetery for American heroes, I avoid the main entrance. I walk along Schley Drive and in five minutes I am in front of the counter at the Temporary Visitor's Center.

Frankly, while I am explaining my intention to locate the grave of an old friend to one of the employees, in view of the limited information I possess, my hopes are not very substantial. The woman writes down the first and last name as well as the supposed year of death (1977) and without anything else, as if what she consults is one of many such requests, she turn around and walks to a computer monitor on the left side of the room. She types on a keyboard and in a few seconds, the computer shoots up some green words and symbols that I cannot catch up with to decipher. For the following act, the clerk, takes one of the small maps, which I already know, and writes the first and last name of "my friend" in red; on the bottom line in the spaces designated for the grave (tomb) and the section, she fills in the corresponding numbers in black.

"Are you familiar with the cemetery?" she asks me.

"Not much..."

"Well, it's easy," she adds in a monotonous tone. "We are here..."

With a red felt tip pen she marks the Temporary Visitor's Center and continues drawing a line to L'Enfant and Lincoln Drives. With a precision that leaves me stupefied, she concludes by marking a point in section 43.

"Here is where you will find the tombstone. If you walk, it will take ten minutes..."

"Thank you."

It is possible the woman interprets my gratitude and wide smile as a logical feeling for being able to locate the person I am searching for so rapidly. But the shots are in the other direction....

My excitement increases as I walk to the point indicated on the map. An act of the computer at Arlington responded affirmatively—declaring there, in effect is a grave for "the brother" of the Major. I am vibrating with emotion, momentarily forgetting my past unsettling experiences.

I stop at the intersection of L'Enfant and Lincoln Drives. If the clerk's directions are not wrong, I must be a little less than 300 meters from finding the grave.

When I review the map, I notice another detail which precipitates my joy: the coordinates 44 and W mathematically converge in this area of section 43. This clarifies the first part of the fourth sentence of the Major's code:

The brother lies in rest at 44-W.

The small asphalt footpath leads me to a meadow lined with hundreds of white tombstones, barely a half a meter high. I consult the grave number and, after several tentative steps on the lawn, the first and last name of the USAF officer sprouts up in front of me almost like a miracle. A small cross is enclosed by a circle and engraved--just like the rest of the graves in Arlington—on the upper part of the stone. Below the name of the deceased are his rank, the division he belonged to, and the dates of his birth and death, respectively. That is all.

I feel a mix of fury and sorrow. This man, who was the same age as my old friend, the Major, had been inhuman without a single allusion in the fascinating mission which had brought an end to his life. And the worse thing is that in his own country--at least to the secret service agents--he is a pawn in aforementioned "journey" which continues to be classified as "secret and confidential"...

The horizon blurs into the green, yellow and red of the trees in the National Cemetery. The white monolith erected in the memory of the first US president paradoxically points to the sky. I kneel down and swear to fight until the end. No one and nothing will stop me in regard to my promise to spread the legacy of these men.

At four-thirty, after I photographed the gravestone, as I am preparing to depart, a shadow startles me. Part of the inscription is beginning to be obscured. I look up and notice a small tree. It is a medlar tree!...*The shadow of the medlar...*I recall the last part of the fourth sentence of the Major's message--*covers him in the late afternoon*. It leaves me absorbed: contemplating how the shaking shadow of this humble companion in solitude is, second by second, robbing the light

from the stone. When I scan the meadow, I realize that this is the only tree growing next to this section of the graveyard. There is no doubt: the code is solved.

I see some of the medlar blossoms have fallen on the lawn and I put them in my bag. Lastly, I cut off a small branch and place it at the base of the headstone. Little by little, with a moribund sun at my back, I move away from this place. I do not turn around to see the fragile medlar tree, with its tiny green leaves, which keeps the American heroes company, but we both know on this afternoon, a part of my heart remains in Arlington.

In my original plan of escape I did not predict, a lot less, that the only way to return is through the hotel's main entrance. Now that I am thinking from a certain perspective, I know very well that no possibility exists for me to enter the hotel via that narrow backstreet and fire escape. What is most definite is I have staked everything I have on an unnecessary validation at Arlington National Cemetery. But now I cannot throw myself back. I am a man who accepts the risks and besides, I love them.

When the taxi stops in front of my hotel's revolving doors, the twilight has begun putting the colors of the big city to sleep. As I pay the driver, I take a breath of relief at recognizing my persevering guardians' sedan about twenty steps in front of me. Either I am very wrong or those individuals believe I am sleeping like a severed leg. Right now I am going to prove it...

I leap out of the taxi and cross the sidewalk looking out of the corner of my eye towards the left. However, it is a question of seconds, I can perceive how one of the agents—the one who sits behind the steering wheel—becomes agitated and suddenly grabs his buddy's shoulder. His companion is reading a newspaper. I do not know what will happen next. I slip into the hall like an exhalation, avoiding the elevator. Thank heavens; the receptionist has her back to me. I assume she does not see me disappear up the stairs.

Gasping and cursing tobacco, I burst into my room at the precise moment the telephone rings. I let it ring a couple of times as I try to recover my pulse. When I answer it, I recognize the receptionist's voice.

"Excuse me, Sir," the employee announces in a very unconvincing voice. "Did you ask me to call you at 5:30 pm or 6:30 pm?"

They are trying to defeat me by setting a trap. But I pretend, assuming that one can find one, if not both agents next to the receptionist...

"At six-thirty, please," I reply in a dry, curt voice.

"I apologize, Sir...There has been an error."

I accept the apologies and before anything can occur, I undress and take a good account of the forgotten lunch. It is five-thirty in the afternoon. If the FBI takes the bait and reckons it was all a mix up and that I have not moved at all from my room, maybe my final hours in Washington won't be too difficult. But what if it is not like that?

I must eliminate the doubts. I begin to plot a new plan. It is necessary to ascertain up to what point they believe my words...

My worry, how easy to guess, centers on the documents. I must keep them safe at whatever price. But, how? I pass more than half an hour reconsidering and exploring every last corner of the room. However, none of the possible hiding places seem sufficiently secure. I go as far as uncoiling the showerhead and considering the possibility of rolling up part of the Major's diary and hiding it in the tube that juts out more than 35centimeters from the bathroom wall. By the grace of the gods, instinct or intuition—or both at the same time cause me to become fearful, so ultimately I decide on a much simpler...and riskier solution. I carefully pierce the second cylinder, which is also protected by a transparent plastic cover and meticulously stapled—and pull out the other bundle of folios.

I dispose of all the staples inside a half-empty bottle of wine. And with the help of various rolls of adhesive tape, I fasten both wads of paper to my chest and back, respectively. After carefully dressing, I proceed to fill the cardboard cylinders with rolls of unexposed photographic film. I put them in the bottom of my camera bag, remove the used film from the cameras and replace it with virgin film.

My proposition is to abandon the hotel like a face up body and leave the field free for the FBI types. I run the gravest danger if, instead of searching my room, they opt to follow and search me. In this second scenario, the documents must fly in a matter of minutes... As a provision for that delicate option becoming the reality, I keep the rolls of TRI-X and slides I obtained during my recent investigations in Mexico, as well as the images of Arlington, in the pockets of my pants and sheepskin coat. In case I am searched, it is always best for them to find the pictures first, or so I think to myself. Perhaps that will satisfy them and they will forget about the rest...

This strategy does not have me excessively convinced, but what else can I do? I cut off the ends of a dozen rolls of film, all of them unused and line them up on top of the small desk, simulating that they are associated with a product of my graphic work over the past days. At six-fifteen, I take a sheet of paper with the hotel's letterhead and write

Friday (6-XI-81)...call D. Garzón at 1pm (telephone 652 5783)

in casual lines. I tear the paper into small pieces, separate one of the little squares of paper with the fragments "ephon" and "6525" written on it and let the rest fall into the metal trashcan. I place that piece of the written note the floor of the room, very close to the trashcan, as if in the process of throwing away the papers—one of them had fallen out of the receptacle. After emptying one of the ashtrays into that same trash can, I proceed to disorder the bed by making tiny wrinkles in the sheets.

At six thirty, just as I wished, the telephone rings. The employee reminds me of the time in a much friendlier tone.

"Thank you very much," I reply taking advantage of the opportunity to round off my plan. "Actually, I would like to go to the movie theatre. Do you know if there is one nearby?"

"Yes, Sir. What type of movie would you like to see?"

"Well, if you would be so kind, please look into it, I'm coming down shortly."

I hang up and rub my hands together. In spite of everything weighing heavily on me, that was electrifying.

Finally, before I abandon the room, I conceal the letter I recovered from Box 21 between the pages of my notebook and carefully wrap my notebook between a pair of newspapers. I verify that I am carrying my passport and my airline ticket—which is still open-dated—for my return trip to Spain via NY; and my last thirty dollars. Then I open the door and push the little lunch cart into the corridor. I put away the "Do Not Disturb" sign and lock the door. As I walk to the elevator, I pass by a tray with various food leftovers—which was placed on the floor next to another room. Suddenly I remember the staples and go back, pick up my bottle of wine and discreetly exchange it for the one from the other guest's room.

Once I am in the lobby again, I converse unhurriedly with the receptionist. Politely and at my request, he accompanies me to the street and points out the very short road which leads to the selected cinema. I pretend I do not understand, so the man repeats the directions with a total luxury of details. He as well as I furtively watch the metallic blue car that is still parked a slight distance away. Actually this comedy forms a part of the second phase of my plan. I want it to be perfectly established that in the course of the next two hours, I am going to be trying to peacefully enjoy a movie. And naturally, it is vital for them to take note... With my hands in my pockets and the "field almanac" well fastened under my arms and camouflaged between the newspapers, I go far away with a distracted air of someone who is starting out on a serene walk. The weight of the folios, especially the ones around my chest, starts to hurt.

Two or three apparently casual stops in front of so many stores are more than sufficient to confirm that the agents have not moved from inside the sedan. With an equally nonchalant gait, I disappear down 17th Street in search of the popular Pennsylvania Avenue. Among its restaurants, commercial galleries, bars and movie theaters it is always very easy to pass unnoticed.

I purchase a ticket and at 7:30 pm I enter one of the movie theaters. But my intention is not to watch a film. After 15 minutes and in front of an indifferent usher, I leave the cinema and head towards a telephone booth. Although I find myself very close to 14th Street, I consider it much more prudent to call the office of Agency F in Washington, D.C. first. One of the journalists, an old friend, is going to play a decisive role in the final part of my plan. Exactly the way I had hoped, the first number rang without stopping. I dial the second number—332 3132 and I ultimately manage to speak to the editor. I do not see myself being forced to give too many explanations. My friend and colleague, whose identity I cannot reveal; for obvious reasons, intuits that something out of the ordinary is happening to me and therefore agrees to see me immediately.

At 8:30 pm I return to McPherson Square, convinced that no one is following me, I quickly slip away into the decrepit elevator in the National Press Building which is located on the aforementioned 14th Street in the city's NW sector. My friend waits for me in Department 969 at the headquarters of Agency F. One hour later, with the same carefree air, I push through the hotel's revolving door. Willingly and without asking too many questions, the journalist promised to help me.

My intuition does not fail me this time. As I approach the hotel's main entrance, I discover that the blue metallic car has disappeared. I reclaim my key from the concierge and observe that the employees are different. Although my fingers grow ghostly, I understand it is a matter of a new shift. I request a wakeup call at 8:30 am on Friday and, with worrying ants in my stomach, I make my way to the sixth floor. I cannot erase the suspicious circumstance of not finding the FBI's vehicle in front of the hotel from my mind. What could have happened in three hours?

I do not need much time to investigate it. No sooner than I close the door to my room, do my eyes fix on the little desk. The unexposed rolls of film that I deliberately lined up in a pattern on its plate glass top have disappeared. Prior to conducting a rigorous general inspection, I open my camera bag and establish, to my relief that my equipment is still there. However, just as I suspected, the half-used rolls I substituted at the last moment have also been removed from their respective boxes and possibly rewound. The rest of the equipment is still intact. The cardboard cylinders full of film did not seem to attract the intruders' attention. The bottom of the bag is covered with green towelettes that I usually "borrow" from the hotels where it is a good idea to protect myself and that, following the custom of my friend and teacher, Fernando Múgica, I utilize as a cushion to avoid impact and rubbing between the cameras and lenses.

None of the four or five medlar branches I collected at Arlington have been stolen by the agents. Since, at this point, just as I can confirm several minutes later, it jumps into my sight that my room was searched by the FBI. (For once in my life I am completely certain.)

In a first check, I can deduce that the rest of my personal effects—suitcase, toiletries, etc. are still where I left them. The individual or individuals who invaded my abode were exceedingly careful not to alter the rigid order that I always impose on my surroundings. Those guys were searching for information—whatever data that could be related to the Major or his "friend" whom I said I was looking for—and I am not going to take a long time to confirm it.

After this rapid inventory, I turn to something more tranquil. I position myself in front of the waste paper basket where I had thrown the torn pieces of paper as well as the cigarette butts from one of the ashtrays.

The pieces of paper are still at the bottom of the container where I left them, with the exception of the one I had intentionally let fall on the room's wooden floorboards. Due to the agent's lamentable error, I also found this one in the bottom of the trash can next to its brothers... Knowing what I know about agents in the information service, I knew one of the locations they always look is precisely in the wastepaper basket. The trap had produced results. After returning to the trash can to procure the 28 parts which fell entirely inside the metal bucket and constructing the sheet of paper that I had ripped up, this clumsy FBI agent left another trail of his steps on the glass table top. How I had imagined the reader, when I emptied the ashtray into the wastepaper basket—and more specifically on top of the shreds of paper. This was not a hygienic gesture although that could be the first impression...

This maneuver was perfectly calculated. And now I examine the glass table to in full light. The sheet of paper was meticulous reconstructed. As I say, it does not take long to detect the intruder's footprint. As he fitted the pieces of paper together, the agent did not perceive the minute portion of ash that fell on the glass surface, however it is sufficient for my intentions.

Once time revealed the jigsaw puzzle, the person restored the remains to their corresponding locations, without taking the precaution of cleaning the surface where he had been working. With the aid of a small magnifying glass, an Agfa Lupe 8X, that I always carry with me and whose great use is for examining slides, I almost instantly locate numerous gray and white particles which can be nothing other than a part of the cigarette ashes which covered the shreds of paper.

If the agents have noted well what was written on the aforementioned sheet of paper, as it is easy to assume, then there is a high possibility that they will fall into a new trap...

Before I go to bed, in case my telephone is tapped, I dial the number for the Spanish Embassy, making known that the person who answers is my friend Mr. Garzón, who is the Director of Information and my request to please, leave a written note that I will phone him at 1pm the tomorrow. Based on this pattern, there is a high probability to assume my conversation is recorded. In this way, without a doubt, the FBI receives a confirmation of what they read in my room.

I let it drop and, in a practical manner pack my suitcase and prepare to go to sleep. But as I am about to brush my teeth, I receive another surprise. Those damned agents punctured the tube of toothpaste section by section via three holes. Just as I feared, they refilled the tube with shaving cream: I find that tube pierced the same way. What have they been capable of and what will these "gorillas" be capable of doing? I start asking myself uneasily.

That night, on account of what can happen, I put the security chain on the door and prop the only existing chair in the room against the door. As the ultimate precaution, I decide not to remove the documents from my chest and back. In contrast to what I thought would occur, the awkward weight was not fat enough to stop me from sleeping due to my exhaustion. For the first time, I slept with a "top secret" between my chest and back.

In accordance with the plan I sketched the previous afternoon at the headquarters of Newspaper F, at ten o'clock Friday morning on the dot, I deposit the keys to my room with the concierge and continue to one of the taxis, which waits outside the doors to the hotel.

After eating breakfast in my room, I proceed to stuff the cardboard cylinders with some of my dirty clothes—handkerchiefs, socks, underwear. I reseal them and write my first name, last name and my address in Biscay on each one. Although it is cool and sunny in Washington, D.C., I put on a bone colored raincoat. With the camera bag on my shoulder, and the Major's cylinders in my hands, I climb into a taxi and ask him to take me to the Main or Central Post Office in the city. If the FBI continues to follow my movements, these cylinders and my colleague—the journalist will help me put them in a good corner.

At 10:30 am, the taxi driver stops the vehicle in front of the post office building. With the promise of an excellent tip, I ask him to wait a few minutes; just enough time for me to stamp and certify both packages. The man kindly agrees and I jump out of the car at the same time that I observe how a black sedan passes the taxi and parks about 80 meters or 100 meters in front of it.

With the presentiment that the occupants of that vehicle have a lot in common with those who burst into my room and searched it the night before, I enter the crowded central office. By the grace of the gods, my friend is already waiting for me inside. At full speed and in front of the astonished eyes of a teenager who is refilling, I don't know what leaflets at the same table where I meet the reporter from F, I take off the raincoat and pass it to my companion. I write down the taxi's license plate number on one of the forms from the pigeonholes and hand him the paper. In Spanish, I warn him to beware of the sedan I saw parked a short distance from the taxi.

Following the set plan, my colleague stuffs himself into the raincoat while I mix into the crowd in the direction of the service window for paying for packages. If all goes well, in five minutes the journalist will get into the taxi which is waiting for my return. In order to make identifying him still more difficult, I had asked him to come to the post office with a bag the same color and as similar as possible to the type I usually carry.

When the clerk takes the cardboard cylinders, I walk to the door. From the threshold, I confirm that the taxi and the sedan have disappeared. Without losing a minute, I walk to the mouth of the subway at Gallery Place. From there I follow the McPherson-Farragut line west, reappearing at Foggy Bottom Station. It is 11:30 am. An hour later, another taxi leaves me at the Washington International Airport. Either I am very mistaken or the FBI agents are on the point of being solemnly "ironed". At 1:25 pm on this turbulent afternoon, Flight 104 of the BN Company finally takes me away from the federal capital.

It is difficult for me to describe those last four hours at the NY airport. If my friend did not succeed in deceiving the stubborn American agents, my security and—what is much worse—the security of my treasure runs a grave risk.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, on the dot, just as we arranged, I dial the telephone number of the F in Washington. My accomplice—whom I never sufficiently thank for his audacity and cooperation—greet me with the password only he and I know.

"From Sature to Bilbao...?"

"I'm going along the entire coast." I respond in a voice broken with emotion.

This means, among other things, that our plan worked. In four words, I can make the link between what happened from the moment he entered the taxi. My suspicions were well founded: the black sedan that was parked a short distance away from the post office's main façade resumed its discreet tracking. The agents, there were three in total, do not imagine that my friend has taken my place and that the muddy labyrinth has no other objective besides allowing me a fulminating exit from the country.

Following the instructions of the new passenger, the taxi driver—who sees the amount of his tip suddenly increase to fifty dollars (a tip that, according to my colleague, makes the driver temporarily deaf and mute) drives the vehicle inside the Spanish Embassy at 2700 Fifteenth Street in front of the presumably desperate FBI men. They both stay there until 1:30 pm. At this time, one of the regular flights from Washington D.C. takes off, bringing me, as I already mentioned, to New York City.

The "gorillas" level of discontentment must have been memorable when, as they were patiently waiting for the taxi to exit, they see the cited vehicle appear, but with two other passengers in the back seat. My friend abandoned the raincoat and the bag inside the embassy. He also put on a red cap and left accompanied by an official and a friend.

The FBI bites the new bait. Since they believe I stayed inside the embassy, they continue waiting.

"It's possible," comments the amused reporter from the F, "that they are still there..."

At 7:15 pm with the documents solidly taped to my chest and back and—why deny it—on the verge of almost tachycardia, TWA Flight 904 lifts me ten thousand miles enroute to Spain.

On the next day, Saturday, once I confirm my landing at Madrid-Barajas, the colleague who personifies me at the hotel, picks up my suitcase and settles the account. Of course, just as I suspected, the cardboard cylinders that I sent via certified mail from Washington, D.C. never arrive at their legitimate destination....

UNTITLED I

How wrong I was! My anguish did not end with the recovery of the Major's diary. From the moment I read those documents, my spirit was wrapped in all kinds of doubts...

For two years, always in the most impenetrable silence, I displayed a thousand due diligences in my attempt to confirm the veracity of as much of the deceased USAF pilot's writings as possible. However, in spite of my efforts, I had little success. The nature of the project was so fantastic that if it had been true, the tombstone on its grave would read "Top Secret" thereby making it inaccessible. Something that can be said in passing is that the Soviets and the Americans have us very accustomed to this, because they insist on the crazy arms race. You do not have to be short of being a lynx to understand the conquest of space for the purpose of developing bellicose potential. Both of them hide a good part of the truth and—what is worse—they do not feel the least amount of modesty in the hour of lies and denials. Neither is it strange, that the iron curtain consequently fell over the project that was the subject of the Major's story and his legacy.

The present work brings an end to the translation—the most accurate possible—of the first 300 pages of a total of 500 pages contained in the two cylinders. Although at this moment, I am not going to unveil the contents of the rest of the project, I can tell you in advance that it conforms to a common denominator: "a grand journey" just like the Major's own definition. A "journey" which would make Jules Verne go pale....

I am not so naïve to suppose, as one would believe, that the risks have disappeared with the discovery and subsequent translation of these documents outside of the United States. On the contrary: it is precisely now, with the motive of jumping into the public light, that the intelligence services can "stretch" their siege around an unconscious journalist. It is a danger I assume, without a certain preoccupation.

But since, one man prepared is worth two, after a cold assessment of the matter, I have taken certain "precautions." One of them, without a doubt the most important—was to deposit the original aforementioned project in a safe deposit box at a bank in the name of my editor José Manuel Lara. In the event that I were "eliminated" the cited documents would be published *ipso facto*.

Naturally, no sooner than I step into Spain, one of my first concerns—as well as a good place to put both original documents—was to make photocopies of the 500 pages I had taken out of Washington D.C. With the aim of avoiding the probable risk of the diary's "disappearance", one of the reproductions was kept—together with the official documents that were delivered in 1976 by the then head of the Air Staff for Spain, Don Felipe Galarza¹ in another safe deposit box under the name of an old, loyal friend who resides in a city on the Spanish coast.

During the two years after I knew the Major's "testament", I stopped the numerous consultations, especially with scientists and doctors, where I attempted to clarify at least the fictional parts distilled from both "journeys". I am going out in front—in honor of the truth—to be the first one to show the skeptics how much the materialization of a similar project is possible.

¹ These three pages from a part of the twelve secret investigations of the Spanish Air Force on so many other cases of UFO's in Spain. It has been published in the book *UFO: Top Secret*.

The weight of this and before it, the responsibilities of the diary—more precisely—I want leave to establish my obligation as a journalist, to start and end exactly with the acquisition and dissemination of the news. It will be the readers—and who knows what people of the future, as was the case with Jules Verne—who must extract their own conclusions and bestow or withdraw their trust in as much as they find in the following pages.

In any case—and I conclude with this—if the Major's "grand journey" was only a dream of a strange and tormented man, then the gods have given a blessing to the dreamers.

THE DIARY

Today is April 7, 1977, a year since my voluntary retirement to the Yucatán jungle—after learning about my brother’s death...and four years following our return from the “grand journey.” I humbly ask the Almighty to grant me the necessary strength and life to contemplate and write as much as I know—by the Infinite mercy of the gods—in Palestine. It is my desire that this testimony will be known among people of goodwill—believers or not—who like us, walk in search of Truth.

I have known it for more than a year—as I also knew it for my brother from the “grand journey” videlicet, my death is near. Because of this, I follow the reiterated requests from my conscience, which grow firmer and firmer each time, by proceeding to organize my notes, memories, and sensations. I hope the person, or persons who someday have access to this humble and sincere diary, respect my will to retain, as my brother, the most strictest anonymity. We are not the protagonist, but “He”.

It is not easy for me to summarize those years before the final “marching order” for the “grand journey”. Although it has never been my intention to disclose my country’s confidential programs and projects, I had access to them due to my position in the military and as an active member—until 1974—of the Office of Aerospace Research (OAR)¹. I understand that prior to offering the fruits of our experience in Israel, I must establish the background for the events leading up to that historic January 1973 for all of those who will read this report.

I must also warn the reader that, given the nature of our scientists’ discovery, and the dramatic consequences, which can be obtained from an erroneous or deliberately negative utilization of the same discovery, my previous explanations only have a purely descriptive character. As I mentioned before, in this case it is not the medium that is important, but the results we enjoy from the good achievement. Hence, I unload the scruples of my conscience and trust that one day—if humanity recovers the lost feelings of justice and spiritual values, it will be responsible for the sublime discovery of those who knew the world in its entirety.

It was in the spring of 1964 when confidentially and purely by chance, the existence of an ambitious and revolutionary project came to my ears. This project was under the auspices of the AFOSI and the AFOSR². For years, it employed a large team of experts from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In October 1963, I was selected, along with thirteen other pilots from the USAF, for one of the projects at NASA. In my capacity as a doctor, a nuclear engineer, and in the post I continued to hold at OAR, I was given the job, specifically to be the supervisor of the project for the so-called Vehicle for the Investigation of the Lunar Landing (VIAL). During that same spring of 1964, two of the curious flying machines—ones that initiated the first trials for the future Apollo lunar landing, finally arrived at the place where I had been destined: NASA’s Center for the Investigation of Flight at the Edwards Air Force Base, eighty miles north of Los Angeles.

I stayed in this desolate landscape—right in the middle of the heart of the Mojave Desert until the end of 1964 when we successfully concluded the preliminary test flights on the VIAL. It is not necessary for me to describe those tests and the other projects—especially those of the

¹ The OAR is the office for the investigation of air and space [J.B.B.’s note].

² AFOSI and AFOSR are the acronyms for the Air Force Office of Spatial Investigations (AFOSI) and the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR), respectively [J.B.B.’s note].

USAF—as they have been classified as “extremely top secret”. The entrance to this location on the base and to the experiment in particular, was limited to personnel with a special security clearance. For months, I lived with the other astronaut candidates, officers, scientists, technicians, all of whom possessed a top-secret security clearance.¹ I began to hear about a fantastic project: Operation Swivel (“The Link”).

Once I finished my work at Edwards Air Force Base, NASA deemed that I must join Marshall Space Flight Center. My true vocation has always been research, specifically in the young “world” of the unified theory of elementary particle physics. However, during the month of December 1964, my worries flowed along other courses. Expense at NASA had started skyrocket and the Marshall Center worked night and day to find new energy systems or sources of energy to reduce the reliance on the costly “chemical” batteries in the Explorer, Mercury and Gemini projects.

A week before Christmas, I flew back to Edwards Air Force Base again due to my work. In the course of one of the lunches with the specialist personnel, I met the new chief of project Swivel; the General ---. He was a serene man of brilliant intelligence who patiently listened to my digressions and laments about the mental myopia of some senior officials at NASA who had rejected my suggestions on the necessity for replacing outdated chemical batteries with fuel cells or atomic batteries.

The general appeared to be interested in some of the details regarding nuclear reactors—when I recognized this—I burst out saturating him with a rain of information and data, which revolved around the excellence of Plutonium 238, Curium 244 and Promethium 147...

Before I turned from the table, the General asked me a single question, "Do you want to work with me?"

Thank heavens my answer was a fulminating: "Yes."

Thus, in January 1965, I definitively abandoned NASA in order to join a research unit with the USAF in the Mojave Desert. I had known a good many of the scientists and military personnel who were toiling on this fantastic project, from my previous stint at the Edwards Air Force Base. This facilitated the affair and my final integration into Operation Swivel was rapid and total. For those first months, my role, in accordance with the wishes of the general who had contracted me, who I will refer to by the assumed name "Curtiss"—centered on a frantic investigation for an auxiliary system to supply energy by means of an atomic battery called SNAP-9A, which is the acronym for Systems for Auxiliary Power².

In those days, the project had already passed the first compulsory stages of the experiment. These had occurred between 1959 and 1963 always under the most ironclad secrecy. Although it preoccupied me excessively, I never knew who had been the promoter or discoverer of the basic system and who had been permitted to conceive of such an adventure. In a number of my multiple conversations with General Curtiss, it was insinuated that although veteran scientists from the Manhattan Project, who had “given the light” to the atomic bomb, had participated in the

¹ The authorization needed to access secrets determined to affect the national security of the United States [J.B.B.’s note].

² They were effectively utilized by NASA and AEC for applications in outer space. These batteries are made from radioactive isotopes and can produce hundreds of watts of electricity for more than a year [J.B.B.’s note].

initial group, the "change in the criteria in respect to the badly named elementary particles had originated in Europe." Apparently, the CIA, by way of the US Air Force, had received a series of documents from Western Europe, which discussed an abrupt 180° change from the previous interpretation of quantum mechanics

In essence, it is not my intention here and now to excessively prolong purely technical details, the driving force for the operation of the "basic system" consists of the discovery of one elemental entity that is generalized in the cosmos. Science had not investigated this area until the moment, which resulted—and will result—in the future "cornerstone" for the best understanding of the formation of matter and of our own universe.

This elemental entity, which was baptized with the name "swivel", has the power of manifesting all of the forces in science for the detection and classification of new subatomic particles. Indeed, it is not anything but a sterile mirage. The reason for this—which has been thoroughly verified by the people, who worked on the experiment—is as simple as it is spectacular: a swivel has the ability to change the position and orientation of its hypothetical "axel"¹ in this way it transforms into a different swivel.

The discovery left the insufficiently initiated perplexed and dragged them irremediably to one very different vision of space, the ultimate configuration of matter and the traditional concept of time.

For example, now space could no longer be considered as a "continuous scalar" in all directions. The discovery of the swivel throws the traditional abstractions of "point", "plane" and "straight line" up onto land. These are not the true components of the universe. Mathematicians such as Gauss, Riemann, Bolyai and Lobachevsky brilliantly intuited the possibility of expanding Euclid's restrictive criteria and elaborated a new geometry for an "n-space." In this case, the aid of mathematics saved us from the serious reef of the mental perception of a body in more than three dimensions. We have assumed a universe of atoms, particles, etc., which form galaxies, solar systems, planets, gravitational fields, magnetic fields, etc. But the innovation and subsequent verification of the swivel has given us a new very different vision of the cosmos: space is nothing other than a collection of associated angular factors, composed of chains and chains of swivels. According to these criteria, the cosmos could be represented as a swarm of these elemental entities—not as a continuous line. Thanks to these constructions, the astrophysicists and mathematicians who were recruited by General Curtiss for Project Swivel, confirmed—to their amazement—how our known universe periodically registers a series of undulating waves or curves, which offer an ordinary perspective very different from the one we always had.

¹ Today the situation is still that this sensational discovery has not been made known to the world's scientific community. Numerous investigators and quantum physicists continue discovering and detecting an infinity of subatomic particles (neutrinos, mesons, antiprotons, etc.) which only contribute to obscuring the intricate field of physics. The day that scientists have access to this information, they will understand that all elementary particles correspond to a material which is nothing other than different chains of swivels--each one of them oriented in a form with particular respect to the others. So many of the specialists, like myself, who worked on this operation had to fold our old conceptions of Euclidean space with its scheme of points and straight lines, in order to assimilate that a swivel is formed by an orthogonal axel which "cannot be cut off" from the others. This specious contradiction was explained by our scientists who confirmed that, strictly speaking, it is not a question of "axels", but angles. (Hence I put the word "axel" in quotes because I am referring to a hypothetical axel.) Therefore, the key is to attribute a new property or character to angles, namely the dimension [Major's note].

But, I do not want to deviate from the principle objective, which has pushed me to write these lines. At the beginning of 1960, due to one of the swivels' most profound consequences, one of the teams on the project made another discovery, which in my opinion, marked a historic milestone for humanity. By means of a technology I cannot even insinuate the hypothetical axels of the fundamental entities were inverted from their position. The result filled all of the scientists with fright and joy at the same time: the tiny prototype, which they had been experimenting on disappeared from the investigators' sight. However, the other instruments continued detecting its presence...

From that moment, all of their strength was concentrated on perfecting the process of inverting the swivels. When I joined the project, the general explained to me that with a little luck, in a few years we would be in the condition to bring about the most sensational explorations...in time and space. A brief time later I comprehended the true extent of his affirmation.

Once we had multiplied our knowledge about swivels and mastered the technique for the inversion of matter, a fascinating reality appeared before the team: "way beyond" or on the "other side" of our limited physical perceptions there were other universes (words only serve to muzzle the description of these concepts) as physical and tangible as the one we know. Successive experiments led General Curtiss' group to the conclusion that the cosmos we enjoy is one of infinite unknown dimensions. (Mathematically it is possible to prove ten.)

From these ten dimensions, three are perceptible to our senses and the fourth one --time-- interacts with our sensory organs as a type of "flow" in a unique interpretation that we crudely define as an "arrow or sense oriented in time." In this torrent of information, a discovery appeared before our astonished eyes which will some day change the cosmic perspective. We named it our cosmic "twin"¹.

¹ I will expand a little on our "bi-cosmos" or cosmic twin, as I restrain myself from hiding its basic characteristics. These analyses are even more humiliating since they limit our arrogant science. In reality, contrary to what we have always believed, a unique cosmos does not exist, however there are an infinite number of pairs of cosmos. The fundamental difference detected between elements in one cosmos (ours for example) verses the other, is based upon how their atomic structure differs in the sign of the electric charge, which our scientists have called and continue to incorrectly call, "matter and antimatter." For instance, our twin cosmos exhibits the following differences:

- a. The outer orbital shell of its atoms contains positive orbiting electrons and its nucleus contains antiprotons (negative protons).
- b. Both cosmos can never be in contact. Neither is there a way to think that they can superimpose relations which are already in separate "dimensions". (There is neither distance nor simultaneity in time.)
- c. Both cosmos possess the same mass and the same ratio corresponding to a hypersphere of negative curvature.
- d. Each one enjoys distinct peculiarities; that is, our twin cosmos does not have the same number of galaxies nor does it have the same structure as "ours". Therefore there is not a twin planet Earth.
- e. Although both cosmos were "created" simultaneously, their arrows of time have no reason to be oriented in the same sense. (Consequently, we cannot say which cosmos coexists with ours in time or which exists before or later. We can only affirm that it exists.)

Perhaps what most impressed our group of investigators was the verification that this twin cosmos exerts a determined influence on our cosmos..., and presumably--because it has not been proven yet--our cosmos actually acts on it [Major's note].

For me personally, as well as the general director of the project, the thing which ended up captivating us was the new concept of "time." When the swivels' axels were manipulated, we proved that these fundamental entities "underwent" a passage of time. They were the time!

To illustrate, long and laborious investigations emphasized that what we call "infinitesimal time intervals" are nothing other than the difference between the angular orientations of two linked swivels. This constituted a genuine cataclysm in our concept of time¹.

It was not very difficult to detect from one of the miracles of nature that the time axels of each swivel point in a common direction... for every one of those instants we childishly define as "my time". At the next instant and the following one and the one after—and so on successively—the imaginary axels change their position, opening the way to a different "now". Obviously, the same thing occurs with the "now" that we call the past. That potential—easily within the reach of our technology—made us tremble with emotion as we imagined the most splendid possible "journeys" into the future and the past².

Starting from that moment in 1966, the project was subdivided into three ambitious programs.

¹ For example, the successive verifications demonstrated that time is similar to a series of swivels whose axels are oriented orthogonally with respect to the radial vectors that imply distance. In accordance with this, the following case became evident: if the inversion of the axels adapts to the observer, in its new reference frame, considered like an antiquated reference system, is valued as a "time interval", then it is easy to understand why an event occurring so far from the Earth (like on a planet in the Cumulus Globular Cluster M-13 which is located 22,500 light years away) can never be simultaneous to other events that register in our own world. This gave us an explanation as to why an object traveling at the speed of light contracts its length along the axis of translation until it reduces to a pair of swivels. Although this distance tends to zero, it is not null as it indicates an error in the Lorentz transformation created by the mathematician Lorentz. Perhaps it could refer to another isolated case of the relation we revealed about the limiting velocity or speed of light, here when the swivels' axels are inverted, they pass into other frames in other dimensions.)

Moreover the process of inverting the swivel's axel must indicate, in principle, that many of the attempts to invert matter are unsuccessful exactly on account of a lack of precision in the operation. When one does not obtain an absolute inversion, the body in question—suppose it is an atom of Molybdenum—experiences a known phenomena in the conversion of mass and energy. (Upon disassociating a single nucleon—say , a proton—from the nucleus of an atom of ¹Mo, we obtain an isotope of Niobium-10.) When the inversion is absolute, the proton appeared to be annihilated, but without breaking the universal principle of the conservation of mass and energy. (Major's note.)

² Although I have already made a light illusion to this transcendental discovery, I will attempt to point out some of the basic contours of the new definition for "time interval." As I mentioned, our scientists understand a time interval "T" as a succession of swivels whose angles differ by constant quantities. Which is to say, what we consider as a swivel and its four axels (which are none other than a representation of the three dimensional reference frame) which, in reality do not exist. In other words, they are very conventional like a symbol; however they serve the mathematician by fixing the real angular position. If the real angle oscillates inside this ideal frame, then we imagine a new reference system of angles, each one forming a 90° angle with the four previous ones. This new reference frame, the result of the real angle and the one described previously, defines space and time, respectively. We observe the "directing axels" that define space and time possess different degrees of freedom. The first one can travel through angles—space in three different orientations which correspond to the three typical spatial dimensions, the second is "condemned" to displacement along a single plane. This led us to believe that two swivels whose axels differ by an angle, such that there is not swivel in the universe whose angle is situated between the both of them, defines a minimum interval of time. I reiterate, it is this interval we call an "instant" [Major's note].

Although they were closely connected, the three teams toiled on the verge of putting as many units as the exploration would permit in the hanger in three well distinguished directions. The first was a "journey" to another dimensional frame from within our own galaxy¹.

The second experiment involved forcing the swivels' time axels towards the future. It ended by translating the entire laboratory—including the astronauts into our own immediate future.

Thirdly, following the opposite process ultimately moved the other platform or laboratory into the Earth's past.

I was assigned to this third project—designated Trojan Horse—to everything related to it and to riding it until it was perfected in January 1973. This is the period I refer to in the first part of the diary.

From 1966 to 1969 our vehicle, called the "cradle" by all members in our group because it looked similar to that piece of furniture, was successively modified until it reached a volume sufficient to accommodate two crew members.

The attention of the small group of scientist chosen for Operation Trojan Horse focused for many months on obtaining a system which would permit one secure and total manipulation of all of the swivels' time axels on the *cradle* both manually as well as electronically.

Finally, a collaboration with the Bell Aerosystems Company, from Niagara Falls, this is the same enterprise that designed and constructed the lunar module or ML for project Apollo, provided us with a laboratory ten feet high with four thirteen feet extendable supports. It weighed a total of three thousand pounds.

The difference between this unit and the one from one of the first projects I cited—whose operation was named "Marco Polo"—was that ours did not need a propulsion system. The process of inverting all of the *cradle's* subatomic particles including its current geometrical location, its occupants and all of the gases, fluids, etc. which composed it, took effect suddenly, which is to say without its surroundings and support poles moving to the chosen location. For all

¹ As I have expressed earlier, I cannot even suggest the basic technique for conducting the inversion of each and every one of the swivels' axels, however I can disclose the idea that the process is instantaneous and considerable energy is required for the physical transformation. This necessary energy which is put into play until the instant when all of the subatomic particles undergo an inversion, is "entirely" reinstated (without losses) as it re-transforms in the crossing into the new three dimensional frame in the form of mass. The preliminary experiments demonstrated that immediately after this jump into the three dimensional frame, the unit shifts to a higher velocity at the moment of inversion without a pronounced abrupt change in velocity (infinite acceleration) of the vehicle. This method of travel--as it is easy to guess--made the rest of the efforts of space rocketry engineers and specialists useless. However, they were still committed to creating an apparatus which was each time more perfect and more powerful...but always driven by the brute strength of combustion or nuclear fission. (Maybe now one can begin to comprehend why I cannot and must not enlarge upon the technical details of a similar discovery...) When we arrived at the end of the jumps or changes in three dimensional reference frames, we were disconcerted as we observed the velocity limit or the velocity of light (299,792.4584 more or less 0.0012 kilometers per second) change appreciably in the new frame. Up to that point the only reference that can reflect the change of axels is precisely the measurement of the velocity or the constant c . Hence we have a family of values: $C_0, C_1, C_2, C_3, \dots, C_n$ which extend from C_0 where the velocity of light is zero to $C_n = \text{infinity}$. Each one represents a different reference system [Major's note].

of those years our work environment (the salt petrous heart of the Mohave Desert) fulfilled another requirement, which was of great importance for the first decisive Trojan Horse experiments. The geological reports encouraged us in every way by assuring us that this zone—despite it being located on the edge of the North American tectonic plate which is one with huge telluric activity—had not suffered any big changes since the end of the Jurassic period more than 135 million years ago when the so-called "Nevada Fault" was created. In spite of all this, as a complementary measure, the *cradle* was supplied with an auxiliary propulsion system, that was a twin of the one in the VIAL, which I had worked on in 1964. General Electric presented us with a principal motor (a CF200-2V jet turbine) which was mounted vertically and facilitated a swift and secure ascension¹.

These security measures were rarely used, however their dual role was of great importance. While we were profiling the first "grand journey" for the Trojan Horse, one of our obsessions was ascertaining the orography of the terrain at the jump backwards in time. If our technical information on the physical geography at the reference point was in error, the inversion of the swivels' time axels could produce a catastrophe. Consider that the *cradle* resides on a plain in the twenty-first century; however it could end up disintegrating if, by error it "appeared" in the interior of a mountain, which could have occupied the space we are using today as a point of contact.

However, after an infinite number of calculations and studies, General Curtiss' team willingly accepted that—save for rare exceptions the inversion phase must always occur in the air in a stationary position. Once the point of contact was visually and electronically located, the *cradle* was able to land with total comfort and without any risk of collision or disintegration.

The first test flight of the *cradle* by the group whose project was the inversion of mass was eliminated for obvious security reasons and brought to an end by the then pilot and chief of research at the NASA Center at Edwards Air Force Base, Joseph A. Walker. He is already deceased now. At any rate, between 1964 and 1965 he directed and participated in more than 24 experimental flights of the VIAL. Walker knew the simulations of the lunar module's landing propulsion systems well and his verdict was positive: regardless of its dilapidated appearance, the *cradle* would respond docilely.

In 1969, after hundreds of highly satisfactory trials, the team definitively set an altitude of eight hundred feet as the ideal height for the mass inversion process. The average time consumed in the operation of lifting off and attaining the stationary position, prior to the inversion phase, was set at five minutes.

¹ This is merely a J85 jet propulsion motor that has a fan installed on its stern which increases its thrust to four thousand pounds and enables it to produce a velocity from zero to 2800. It was mounted on an annular universal joint and stabilized with a gyroscope so that it pointed straight downwards, even when there was a possible inclination of the *cradle*. In previous landing tests its thrust was precisely regulated by five sixths of the module's weight.

The remaining sixth of the weight was supported by another two auxiliary lift rockets each one produced a maximum thrust of five hundred pounds with hydrogen peroxide fuel. They were mounted on the *cradle's* main structure so they could tilt with the vehicle. Eight small rocket propulsion motors, also fueled by hydrogen peroxide, controlled the *cradle's* position. Each rocket's position was operated by a type of individual solenoid valve. If we tried to use it as a small plane, the pilot would control the pitch by moving from stem to stern, and the wobble by moving a lever to the left or the right. In addition, the *cradle* was equipped with pedals that regulated the yaw. The lever and the pedals were electrically connected to the solenoid valves [Major's note].

At last, in the autumn of 1969, the general gave the green light and four of the exceptional astronauts, myself included, formed the first teams for the "flight into the past". We were fortunate to participate in a total of six experimental retrocessions in time. All of these were carried out in pairs. The stationary state was maintained at eight hundred feet above ground in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

Now I was concerned that these fascinating experiences were taking me far from my true intention. I will omit their descriptions, because they are meticulously detailed in other sources, which are currently under the authority of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and, unfortunately, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). Yes, I will point out that thanks to the revolutionary computer network¹, which from the onset served to locate the swivels (and was subsequently incorporated into the mass inversion system), the delicate system for the adjustment and retrocession of the swivels' time axels to the dates programmed by the team produced astonishingly accurate results.

This gigantic force was naturally of little use, if our technology had not been able to transform the bundles of swivels--in particular their time axels--to force the new angles. Using a complex procedure, the computer network fine-tuned the "transfer" of the "axels" and eventually the module, within an error of "plus or minus two hours" of the chosen dates.

¹ Although I do not consider it timely to reveal the natural intimacy of that conjunction of computers, I can however clarify that the difference between the traditional computer systems and those used in operation Trojan Horse is that there were no integrated electronic circuits. This is to say, they had vacuum tube components based in solid state technology and eliminated transistors with solid state diodes, conductors and semiconductors, by inductors, etc. The only exception was a few organics topologically integrated into stable crystals called "nucleic amplifiers". Its main characteristic was that it did not amplify electrical tension or intensity like common amplifiers, but power. The energetic function injected into the nucleic amplifier was reflected in the output as another more elevated analytical function. The liberation of energy was made at the expense of the mass integrated into the amplifiers and the phenomena took place on the dimension of the molecular scale. The process operated on a sufficient number of atoms so that the function can be considered macroscopically continuous.

In regard to the basic structure and character of these supercomputers, in a purely descriptive fashion, I can say the following:

The digital computers currently in use generally rely on a central memory based on magnetic ferrite and various peripheral memory units, such as magnetic tape, discs, cylinders, rods wrapped with helicoidal bands, etc. All of these are capable of storing and coding information magnetically in a very limited number of bits, assuming we are talking about codes with millions of digits. On the other hand, the computers used in the Trojan Horse Project were based on titanium and a different technique. We know that the orbital electrons in an atom can be excited so that they reach different quantum energy levels. The step from one state to another liberates or absorbs quantized energy which carries an associated characteristic frequency. In this way, an electron in a titanium atom can change its energy level by emitting a photon, but in a titanium atom, as in other chemical elements, electrons can move to various states and consequently emit different frequencies. This phenomenon is referred to as a chemical element's "characteristic emission spectrum" and it enables an identification of a chemical element from spectroscopy data. Very well. If we alter the electron's quantum energy level in titanium, at will, then we can change them so that they carry, i.e. store or accumulate an elementary message: a number. If an atom is capable of reaching, for example, twelve or more states, each one of these levels symbolizes or codes a number from zero to twelve. Yet a simple pill-sized piece of titanium contains billions of atoms. We could well imagine the coded information it would be capable of accumulating. None of the forms of macrophysical based memory can compare to it.

For the moment, I am not allowed to explain how we managed to excite the titanium atoms [Major's note].

At last, the big day arrived. General Curtis convened an urgent meeting. The people from Trojan Horse project, who were always under Curtiss' command, outlined half a dozen "journeys" each one was more fascinating. Even so, logic and a strict sense of order did little to recommend launching several projects at the same time. They were to decide on a primary exploration without relegating it to him to forget the rest of the propositions. After many hours of debate, in an emergency session at Edwards Air Force Base, the top scientists and specialists unanimously selected three "moments" in humanity's history as possible or immediate candidates for a final election. It was March 10, 1971.

The three objectives in question were :

1. March-April of the year 30. Witness just the last days of the Passion and the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

2. The year 1478. Location: Madeira Island. Objective: Try to find out if Christopher Columbus could have received some information in reference to the pre-discovery of America, such the existence of new lands as well as the route to follow in order to get to them.

3. March 1861. Place: Our own USA. Objective: To know the exact cause of the Civil War and the thoughts of the newly elected President Abraham Lincoln.

Each one of the projects had been exhaustively prepared down to the smallest detail. I proposed and fiercely defended the second "journey". Through numerous lectures and contacts with experts at Yale University, I was convinced that Columbus was not the first one to discover the Americas and this was a magnificent opportunity to find out the truth. But the "journey" to the Civil War as well as to the one to the Portuguese Madeira Island were both parked for the benefit of the first one: the transfer in time to the year 30 of our era. Despite the defenders' natural disappointment about the eliminated adventures, we all recognized the level of risk was significantly lower in a "grand journey" to Christ's Jerusalem, than one in the American Civil War or the fifteenth century. In the event of an exploration of Lincoln's time, the chosen astronauts could evidently run into physical danger and neither General Curtiss nor the rest of the members of Operation Trojan Horse were ready to play a game with our people's security. As for the "journey" I proposed, it lacked precision in regards to how the exact date of the "pre-voyage", when Columbus arrived at Madeira Island with his caravel, was determined. Our historical sources, however rigorous, produced an inevitable margin of error¹.

Starting from this final and decisive resolution, the 61 members of the Trojan Horse team for the "exploration of the past", acted as a single person. We knocked ourselves over in order to fine tune it so it could go on our first official adventure in time. I am not going to deny that my spirit was profoundly altered during the weeks after General Curtiss selected me to be a crew member on the *cradle* and to "descend" into Jesus of Nazareth's time. In spite of the undeniable joy of being, I suppose, the first pair to "explore" another time, the responsibility was so complex

¹ Take 1478 as a reference. This is the most probable date for Christopher Columbus' settlement on Madeira Island where his mother-in-law managed a tavern and which is in agreement with the testimonies of the priest, Bartolomé de las Casas, and the Leyenda Taína tribe. It was probably the mysterious "pre-discoverers" of America who had visited the Caribbean Islands (especially Hispaniola) in the months immediately prior to the said date, perhaps in 1476 or 1477. It would have been at least 1478 when the involuntary "discoverers" made a fortuitous port of call at the aforementioned Portuguese island on their way back to Europe [Major's note].

that I was overwhelmed. Many days were necessary for me to adapt and serenely assimilate my commitment.

I never knew exactly why the chief of Project Swivel designated me for this "grand journey". It is very possible that at the hour of judgment based upon personal knowledge and conditions, other colleagues could have occupied my place by an ample margin of merit. In one of my many interviews with Curtiss due to my appointment, he had suggested the nature of the exploration fundamentally demanded the presence of a man who was skeptical about religious matters. In contrast to a lot of the other team members, I was not active in the church, or any religious movement, since my character was patently agnostic. Throughout my rigid scientific and military education, I always endeavored to respect the beliefs and religious inclinations of others, even though I had never felt the least necessity to take refuge in or search for inspiration from transcendental ideas.

How little I imagined what destiny had reserved for me! And I had to identify with the General, that in effect, objectivity was one of the fundamental conditions for performing these historical "observations" with a minimum of rigor.

My task in this "transfer" to the year 30 was the same as that of my partner. It required the acceptance and complement of the norm, this transformed in to a Golden Rule for the entire Trojan Horse Team: the explorers could not—under any circumstances, not even for their own survival—alter, change or influence the people, social groups or situations that were the object of our observations or which simply could evoke a change in the course of events. At the time for accepting this principle, any vacillation based on it was sufficient reason for a fulminating expulsion from the group of explorers. This made the inviolable presupposition into an absolute goal in our observations. Nevertheless, with his characteristically subtle prudence, in our case the General preferred the objectivity of a hand that was especially detached in religious matters.

In a medium as powerful as the manipulation of the swivel's time axels, it is easy to comprehend how it would be extremely dangerous if it fell into the hands of unscrupulous individuals or ones with a fanatical or partisan view of history. The first six mass inversion experiments were done in the Mojave Desert under a strictly experimental guise to verify that the translation of the module and its pilots to remote dates did not affect the crew's natural psyche or memory. While the "jump backwards" was hard, the crew was conscious of their own identity at every moment. They also remembered which era they normally belong to. Thoroughly and with full honesty the team discussed the serious repercussions that could be involved for a person or a community and the tragic circumstances which could result if, for instance, "someone" from a past epoch died in a confrontation with one of our explorers. If the cause-effect principle responds to reality, the historical denouement could be disastrous. Consequently, our mission above all could only aspire to observe and analyze events, important people and selected times. And that was not insignificant...

Fortunately for Trojan Horse project, our relations with the State of Israel were unsurpassed, especially starting from the Six Day War. It was a prerequisite for the execution of the "grand journey" that the *cradle* could be moved to Palestine and positioned at the chosen "contact point" entirely without raising suspicions. But I have rarely referred to the duties that weighed wholly upon General Curtiss' back. Only at the end, with no more than two months to go, did those of us closest to the chief know about the obstacles which sprung up, the difficult conditions imposed by Golda Meir's government and the unsuccessful but irritating CIA attempts to take over of the project.

These battles which were fought in the obscurity of offices and the state bureaucracy passed unnoticed by me and the rest of the team as we were absorbed in the final preparation phase for the adventure. (Now I thank the heavens for this supine ignorance...)

For the rest of 1971 and almost all of 1972, my center of operations changed remarkably. During those two years, my time was divided between the tiny village of Ma'lula, the University of Jerusalem and Edwards Air Force Base. Trojan Horse project designed the two phases to be perfectly clear and specific. In the first stage, the module undergoes the mass inversion process by forcing the swivels' time axels to the preset day and year. Within this first stage, because it is logical, my co-pilot and I remain on board the craft until both the "entry" into the designated date and the settlement at the contact point are definitive.

Without a doubt, the second stage is the most daring and attractive. As one of the explorers, I was obliged to leave the *cradle* and mix in with the, at that time, Jewish village as I became a witness of the exceptional last days in the life of Jesus of Galilee. This was "my job".

This task, which I did not want to think about until the last moment arrived—required me to undertake years of feverish study of the customs, most important traditions and languages in use among the Israelites in the year 30. A good part of those 21 months was dedicated to difficult instruction in the language spoken by Christ: Western Aramaic or Galilean. Following the texts of Spitaler and his teacher, Bergsträsser, from the University of Munich, it was not hard to locate the only three corners of the planet where they still spoke Western Aramaic: the tiny village of Ma'loula in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, the small populations of Jubb'adin and Bakh'a (today they are totally Muslim) in Syria¹.

Although the Arabic language ended up jumping over the Lebanese mountains and contaminating the idioms of the three villages, their phonetics and morphologies continue to be fundamentally Aramaic. A timely document from the University of Cornell, which authorized me as an anthropologist and an investigator of dead languages, opened all of the doors for me so that I could complete my studies at the University of Jerusalem. There I contrasted my knowledge of Galilean Aramaic that I had learned amongst the simple people of Anti-Lebanon and from other sources such as the Palestinian Targum and Aramaic literature from the Koran, Nabataea and Palmyra.

My preparation was completed with a few basic but sufficient notions of the Mishnaic Hebrew and Greek which was also spoken in Palestine in Christ's time.

Even though I travelled through the so-called Catholic Holy Places an infinite number of times I was conscious that recognizing those spots would serve me little in the hour of truth... For obvious reasons, I preferred to confront the events with an open spirit without preconceived ideas. If my duty was to observe and transmit the truth about what happened in those days, then it was most advisable to maintain a clean attitude devoid of prejudices.

¹ As supplementary information, I can add that access to the village of Ma'loula, at least in 1971 and 1972, was via the road from Damascus to Hims. Travel along this road for 50 kilometers and then turn left. After 9 kilometers, start looking for a Catholic monastery with Basilian monks. At the foot of this monastery you will find Ma'loula with its population of less than one thousand residents. All of the inhabitants are Catholic. The church is run by Lebanese priests who speak Arabic. This is the same language used to perform the liturgy. However, the language spoken in the village is occidental Aramaic which is now very mixed with Arabic, and other words and expressions from the Turks, Persians and Europeans [Major's note].

On my return to Edwards Air Force Base at the end of 1972 everyone had long faces. I knew immediately. The final confirmation arrived from General Curtiss' own lips: despite negotiations at the highest level, the Israeli government had not given its authorization for the *cradle* or the rest of its advanced equipment to enter their country. Logically, they had the right to know what we were attempting and the chief of the Trojan Horse Project had not provided the information to settle this consummate question. However the strictest sense of security made it unviable for the general to advise the Israelis about the real nature of the operation. What could we do?

After an agitated December, in which we sincerely began to fear for the success of the "grand journey", the Pentagon, following Curtiss' recommendation, planned a strategy to make the Israelis yield. Beginning in 1959, the Soviet Union and our country developed a secret spy satellite program for the mutual observation of all types of installations: military, industrial, agricultural, urban, etc. These "flying eyes" were achieving penetrations, especially starting with the so-called "third generation satellites" introduced in 1966.

For the fourth generation the Pentagon collaborated with companies that specialized in photography such as Eastman Kodak, Itek Corporation and Perkin Elmer and managed to put a new satellite model in orbit: the Big Bird series. Its instrumentation was capable of photographing the headlines in a newspaper held by a person seated in Moscow's Red Square, from an altitude of 150 kilometers. In spite of the extreme reserve at the National Reconnaissance Office—a department with headquarters at the Pentagon that specializes in this type of information—some of the Big Bird's characteristics ended up filtering into the intelligence agencies in other countries. Golda Meir's government had been pressing on numerous occasions for our precise spy satellite network to provide them with graphic information about the movements of troops, the installation of launch pads, and new construction in Arab countries. Well, good. This was our opportunity.

For approximately a year and a half after 1971, the Pentagon had begun a new design of the Big Bird satellite: the KH II.

After a previous authorization by the top state Major of the U.S. Army and personal interviews with President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger, Curtiss flew to Jerusalem again. This time he did offer Prime Minister Golda Meir and her Minister of War, the legendary Moshe Dayan, a "satisfactory" explanation in the form of the strictest secret: the U.S. desired to collaborate with its friend—Israel—and set up a laboratory for the reception of photographs from the Big Bird satellite. In this way the Jews could utilize a fast and accurate system for controlling their enemies and my country, through a new strategic station, would save time and a good part of the constant recovery of the eight rejected capsules which carried each satellite and were rescued every fifteen days from the ocean on the outskirts of Hawaii. From a purely military perspective, the operation generated a great deal of interest in the U.S. since it could photograph, at its pleasure, very "unstable" zones (politically speaking) such as the borders of the USSR with Iran and Afghanistan, and other areas in Pakistan, and the Persian Gulf, and receive hundreds of negatives at "our" and the Israelis new station within three minutes of the satellite's flight over the said region¹.

¹ The Big Bird satellite series—especially the KH II prototype—could fly at a speed of 25,000 kilometers per hour, which meant it needed a total of ninety minutes to circle the Earth. Since it swiftly oscillates 22°30' over this time period, on its next revolution, the Big Bird flies over a different band off Earth and changes its trajectory every 24 hours. If the Pentagon "discovered" something of interest, the satellite could

Thanks to this subtle trick, at the beginning of January 1973 General Curtiss and part of the equipment for the Trojan Horse project successfully landed in Tel Aviv. In order to evade suspicion, a mutual agreement was made with Mossad (the Israeli intelligence agency) for the USAF to commission a jumbo jet with all of its passenger seats removed. Its cabin was loaded with ten metric tons of "top secret" instrumentation. The people on the fake passenger plane included members of the distinguished Jewish company The Al, who alighted as a large group of apparently peaceful American tourists. It was January 5. What those sagacious agents from the Israeli intelligence service did not realize was that the material for the satellite receiving station was traveling with our *cradle*

Curtiss' plan was simple. According to a meticulously elaborate study undertaken in Washington, D.C. with the Communication Instruction for Reporting Vital Intelligence Sightings (CIRVIS) in collaboration with the with the Israeli Minister of War's Department of Cartography, the network for receiving photographs from Big Bird must be completed within a maximum of six months from the receipt of the equipment. The experts must proceed with the first phase after the selection of a suitable site. The military had designated three possible locations: the peak of Mount Olive or Mount of Olives—a short distance from the Holy City of Jerusalem; the Golan Heights, on the border with Syria, or the massif granite in Sinai.

General Curtiss had astutely made the first possible location for the receiving station coincide with our point of contact for the "grand journey". Long before Golda Meir's government blocked the progress of our operation, the specialists working on the Trojan Horse project had determined that Mount Olive was the appropriate zone for the *cradle's* landing. Its proximity to the villages of Bethany and Jerusalem had convinced them that it was the strategic location for the "descent". Nonetheless, the Israelis exhibited a certain surprise at the nomination of this hill. Still the first of the three experimental bases seemed sufficient enough after the Americans' convincing explanations. The Israelis saw themselves involved in innumerable skirmishes with their neighbors, the Egyptians and the Syrians. If it had started the installation of the receiving station near Sinai or by the Golan Heights, the risk of destruction by enemy aircraft was high.

It was necessary to gain time and—above all—train the Israelis how to operate the equipment with an ample measure of security and without startling them. Once the ideal site was located and the Israelis' extensive controls and instructions were fulfilled, the laboratory would enter the operational phase shared by both countries. To all indications, I suppose this period of time was more than adequate for our work. To a great extent the Israelis accepted the Americans' advice with excellent acquiescence: their collaboration expanded to transporting and guarding the equipment.

In the middle of 1972, the people from operation Trojan Horse decided that the "point of contact" must be a small square which was surrounded by an octagonal mosque named "The Ascension of the Master". The high wall, from the era of the Crusades, which surrounded the relic was the perfect bulwark for avoiding curious gazes. Curtiss and the rest of the group had planned everything down to the most insignificant details. The experiment was inexcusably set for January 30, 1973. This was the perfect moment for various reasons, in the first place, the assembly of the electronic components for the Big Bird receiving station must commence on the

modify its orbit by extending the time for a revolution by several minutes and lowering its orbital altitude to 120 kilometers. For example, a difference of one degree and thirty minutes each day allowed it to cover a conflict zone every ten days, as it flew over all cities and zones of military interest. Big Bird was subsequently boosted into a higher orbit [Major's note].

twentieth or thirtieth of the same month of January. Secondly, on these dates the stream of pilgrims to the holy places declines significantly. Lastly, this was the way the group desired to honor the memory of one of the greatest men in humanity: Mahatma Gandhi. January 30, 1973 is the exact date for celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death.

I suppose the primordial reason was the first one. The Trojan Horse team needed a week to assemble and do a general check on the *cradle*. At the time, General Curtiss was drafting the proposal for the installation of the satellite image receiving station, he had imposed a condition which was understood and accepted by Golda Meir and her cabinet: given the top secret character of the optical scanners and some of the electronic elements, the assembly of the instrumentation could only be performed solely and exclusively by Americans with a high level security clearance. During this phase, the security and surveillance inside the station would be the ineludible mission of the United States. The Israeli government would take charge of protecting the exterior and could participate in the project at the conclusion of the said assembly. This sophism had no justification other than keeping the Israelis far away and permitting us to completely carry out our real program.

The jump in time, which was scheduled for Tuesday, January 30 had been limited to a total of eleven days. So the Trojan Horse Project had arranged for a maximum of three weeks for fine-tuning the *cradle*, executing our own adventure, and the no less delicate return.

Several days before the fake American tourists departed from the U.S. bound for Tel Aviv, Moshe Dayan had given suitable orders for his secret service to activate a limited but vital mini-operation to "take possession" of the Ascension mosque. It was precisely so that our technicians could work inside the small square without raising the suspicions of the entire population, and just as importantly, of the Muslims, who were responsible for the worship services held inside the octagonal tabernacle which stood in the center of the site.

In those days the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as well as the Egyptian secret service, the Al-Mukhabarat Al-Harbeya, who were perfectly connected to the Soviet agents (who still operate in Cairo), had spread an intense wave of terrorism in Israel. "Postal" bombs were in style and rare was the day when one of these lethal artifacts was not either exploded or discovered in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv or in the rest of the country. (On just the day before our operation—January 29—they received a total of nine postal "bombs" in different buildings and organizations in the city of Jerusalem.)

The most efficient Jewish secret service agency, Mossad, was consummated on the afternoon of January 1. A pair of young agents, with the look of complete tourists, "forgot" a suspicious briefcase next to the sturdy wall of the Ascension Tabernacle. Mossad itself was in charge of sounding the alarm and in a matter of minutes the small square and the octagon were evacuated. Meanwhile, a group of bomb deactivation specialists was responsible for the "inspection" and explosion of the same package—a supposed terrorist bomb. Given the nature of the place and the previous agreement with those responsible for the custody of the Holy Places, the incident was covered up by the news media.

However, Dayan's Israelis had planned the explosion so that if it proceeded, it would only damage the mosque's exterior walls. Nevertheless, in a routine but obligatory inspection of the rest of the octagon, Mossad and the architects from the Sappers Division "discovered" and showed the stewards of the site plates and x-rays of the face of the mosque's foundation that were affected by the attempted bombing. This left the Muslims confused. But Mossad had foreseen it all. In a gesture of "goodwill", before the bewildered Arabs, the Jewish vice-president, Yigal

Allon, convened those responsible for the mosque to inform them that the governor had made the decision to repair the damage "as a demonstration of good faith". The imminent proximity to Passover and the Christian Holy week justified a thousand miracles in the uncommon rush of Golda Meir's government to undertake the monument's restoration. No one would suspect that a double purpose sheltered beneath this opportune and apparent Israeli political maneuver.

The resulting comedy was simply perfect. Even though the mosque's foundations were found intact, no one dared place any doubt on the data from the supposed architects. Forty-eight hours after the explosion, with the Arabs' consent, a "special division" composed of archeologists and experts from the University of Jerusalem, the French Archeology and Biblical School at the Holy City, and the Museum of Antiquities of Amman, started working on an excavation around the perimeter of the small mosque. In all sincerity, we never knew how the Israeli secret service managed to "involve" the aforementioned team in such a restoration job. After several moments we even began to suspect these discreet and diligent archeologists were none other than people from Mossad.

The fact is, when General Curtiss and the rest of the members of the Trojan Horse Project took a trip for our first inspection of the little Ascension plaza, the workers had opened ditches next to the mosque and had raised two huge huts, one on each side of the octagon. As per the previous agreement, these were the facilities for Curtiss and the Dayan's army. The small square, which measured 71 ft in diameter, was surrounded by a stone wall nine feet high. This was more than sufficient for our purposes and, I suppose, for the installation of the receiving station for the photographs.

After January 7, in a spread out fashion which took advantage of the constant entrances and exits of material, the Israelis and Americans managed to carry all of the secret equipment into the huts. A week later with the logical rejoicing of General Curtiss and all of the scientists and soldiers who had taken part in transporting the instruments, everything was ready for the construction of the Big Bird's receiving station. This was almost seven days ahead of schedule.

At the halfway point—January 15—the chief of the Trojan Horse Project communicated to the military authorities that the American engineers were ready to begin the task of staging the laboratory and consequently, in accordance with the pact, access to the huts would remain strictly prohibited to all non-American personnel. The Israelis withdrew to the exterior of the enclosure, where they maintained a neutral corridor so they could circle around the "archeologists" whose work must not be suspended for any reason. If the Arabs arrived at the intuition that the repair work on the mosque was nothing besides a "front" to hide purely military objectives, then the Trojan Horse and our own position as a receiving station would have been in a very compromised position.

As the restoration team continued with their mission at the foot of the octagon's walls, we unpacked the equipment and applied ourselves to the frantic task of assembling the *cradle*.

But our joy and that of the General was going to suffer a sudden reversal. We never knew how the venomous tentacles of the CIA had touched and detected the operation. In conjunction with the Jewish Americans and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), they were pressing Kissinger for information. The subsequent refusals from the Secretary of State were creating tensions between the CIA and the smaller military circles at the Pentagon that were aware of the mission. The situation was so untenable that General Curtiss was recalled to Washington, D.C. in order to soothe their minds and try to find a solution.

Although the rest of the Trojan Horse team continued with the effort, even their courage shrank in the propinquity of the always dangerous shadow of the CIA.

In this case, Curtiss' manifested ability was worthless. Richard Helms, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was not ready to concede. Faced with the gravity of events, at the express suggestion of Kissinger, and President Nixon's "advice", Helms retired as director of the CIA a few days later. On January 4, in order to reinforce the confidence of the Pentagon, the general and intimate collaborator Curtiss Alexander Haig was appointed as the second in charge to the top State Major of the U.S. Army. The newspapers published at that time attributed the resignation of the Director of the CIA to a "profound disagreement between Helms and Kissinger in matters related to State security". They were not on the wrong track, yet they never knew the real reason for this drastic "surgical operation" on the Central Intelligence Agency and the top State Major of the U.S. Army.

Once he had ridden out the storm, Curtiss returned to Jerusalem and reincorporated himself into what—without a doubt was to be one of the greatest adventures in humanity's history. On January 25, 1973, the *cradle* already positioned in the center of the main hut. It had been entirely reassembled with the exception of the four support poles. For obvious reasons of prudence these were not added until a few hours before the take off. A handy hydraulic device allowed the roof of the improvised hanger; where the operations took place, to totally open. In this way, if we continued with the plan, the module's launch on the night of January 30 would not present any special difficulties.

I assume the person who reads this diary will ask how a vehicle with the characteristics of our *cradle* could rise over Mount Olive without attracting the attention of the general populace and the Israeli army. Long before this operation was initiated, project Swivel had incorporated an emission system of permanent infrared radiation as a basic feature in almost all of its future missions. The *cradle*, which was the case that concerned me, had a special exterior "membrane" which covered the entire vehicle. Its main functions, beyond which I cannot specify, were the following¹:

1. Screening by means of a "shield" or a "buffer" of infrared radiation with wavelengths above 700 nanometers. This infrared light source made the apparatus totally invisible. Hence we had the power to maneuver over any population center without being seen. The requirement was entirely essential for our exploration not to harm the natural rhythm of the individuals that we wanted to study and observe.

¹ As purely descriptive information, I can say that the *cradle's* membrane or covering possessed some very special properties. The effect was maintained by a liquid alloy flowing through pipes in the finest vascular network. So that you have a general idea, some of the elements which did not occupy volumes greater than 0.07 cubic millimeters were made of micro devices that were fabricated on the cellular scale.

This porous ceramic cover for the *cradle* had an elevated fusion temperature of 7260.64°C and its external emission was equally very high. In contrast its thermal conductivity was very low at 2.07113×10^{-6} coulomb per centimeter per second per degree Celsius. (For this membrane it was very important that the threshold for ablation was maintained inside very wide tolerance.) This was accomplished with a liquefied lithium based cooling system which operated by transpiration. In addition, a fine layer of colloidal platinum 0.0108 meters thick covered its external surface [Major's note].

2. It absorbs the ultra-high frequency waves without reflection or refraction by utilizing the same mechanisms as radar systems. (The waves from these security devices were adjusted in advance to 1347 and 2402 megahertz in relation to the Israelis' radar screens.) This simple modification cancelled the possibility of the module being located electronically while it was elevated at 800 feet that is the ideal point for the first mass inversion phase.
3. The "membrane" that covered the *cradle's* armored exterior (its total thickness was 0.0329 meters) produced an artificial incandescence, which eliminated whatever type of germs that were living on or adhered to its surface. This precaution prevented these germs from being three dimensionally inverted with the craft. The involuntary entry of such organisms into another "time" could have unforeseen biological consequences.

In respect to the inevitable roar of the J85 jet engine that kept us in the "stationary" position, the scientists succeeded in reducing the sound to a sharp whistle by using a powerful silencer. Another query addresses the "boom" produced at the instant of the *cradle's* mass inversion. This noise was impossible to address until the moment it occurred. It was luck for us that this bang could be attributed to anything the Israelis were hunting on land during the day or night. When the sound barrier is crossed, the disturbance of the air molecules produces a sound which astronaut's call a "sonic boom."¹

Just as in the six prior tests held in the Mojave Desert, our moods changed as we approached the module's launch time. Curtiss attempted to keep me and the co-pilot away from the Ascension mosque for a couple of days, but our steps always ended up leading us to the hanger. Three days before the commencement of the "grand journey", the chief of the Trojan Horse project called us together for a final meeting in order to review the guidelines for the operation. Curtiss seemed obsessed with our safety. We both knew our respective duties, yet the general's persistence disturbed us. What could the director of Project Swivel be hiding? Months after the experiment, my "brother" and I had the occasion to know the true reason for his anxiety....

The strategy we were to follow in the "descent" to the time of Jesus of Nazareth had been thought through to the bottom. Once we were on land, after hours of checking the controls, my

¹ At the moment of the mass inversion, a hypothetical observer who is located a short distance from our module (suppose we have deactivated the infrared camouflage system) would have the feeling that the ship had been "annihilated." But nothing is farther from reality. In the instant when all of the swivels corresponding to the zone bounded by the membrane change their axels in the three dimensional frame where the observer is, the entire mass inside the enclosure ceases to possess physical existence. This is not to say that the mass is "annihilated" because the substrate for this mass is composed of swivels. In other words, mass must not be interpreted as a type of fold in the warp of swivels. Our scientists describe this phenomena as if the orientation of a "dimple" or "pleat" in the constituents of space changes in a way that an observer's sensory organs or physical measuring instruments are incapable of perceiving.

At the instant we call T_0 the vacuum inside the enclosure is absolute. There is no longer a single molecule of gas; and of course, no solids or liquids are present, not even a subatomic particle such as a proton, neutrino or an atom of the module, etc. that can be probabilistically located inside the enclosure or in the module. Which is to say, the value of the probability function is zero, T_0 . However such an unstable situation lasts for an infinitesimal fraction of time. The zone is subsequently invaded by quantum energy. Hence, electromagnetic and gravitational fields of different frequencies propagate within its cavity. The space is immediately traversed by ionic radiation and at the end, this generates an implosion which precipitates the exterior gas into the vacuum thereby allowing the structure to "disappear" [Major's note].

fellow traveler—who, from now on, I will refer to as “Eliseo”—would stay with the *cradle* throughout the eleven days of the exploration. Only in the case of an extreme emergency would he abandon the ship. My role demanded that I disembark and approach the Master of Galilee whom I must follow and observe all of the time that it was possible.

In order to avoid the possible temptation for the explorers to exceed the time set for the operation, the *cradle's* central computer was pre-programmed without an extension or cancellation option, and with an automatic departure and return of the swivels' time axis to seven hours on February 12, 1973. At that time, everything inside the Ascension mosque would be ready for the module's re-entry and dazzling dismantlement.

While the adventure was proceeding, Curtiss' group would apply themselves to completing the second hut and erecting a laboratory for receiving photographs from Big Bird. This would enable a rapid evacuation of the equipment for the Trojan Horse just as the Israeli personnel entered the hangers.

Before Curtiss adjourned our final working session, he announced, in accordance with the Pentagon and, I assume Kissinger, that 24 or 36 hours prior to liftoff, the world's attention would be focused on an event thousands of miles from Jerusalem, which would reinforce the security measures for our jump into the first century. Indeed, just as the general had disclosed, on January 23, 1973 it was proclaimed that after “intense efforts by both sides” the United States and Vietnam signed a definitive peace accord in Paris, which promised an end to the tragic war....

On January 30, Eliseo and I barely left the hanger. Almost all of our work occurred inside the *cradle* where we inspected the equipment. My co-pilot had to submit to one last delicate operation: a small probe, capable of collecting solid waste, was inserted into his rectum. The outfit had been tested earlier. This miniature device, which was attached to his buttocks, pumped in and suctioned out water at 38° C during the eleven days he was obliged to stay inside the module.

In this manner, solid waste is decomposed into its basic chemical elements. Part of the output was gelled and transmuted into oxygen and hydrogen which contributed to our store of synthetic water which was recovered from urine, among other things, and used to produce drinking water. The rest of the components were converted into mud and expelled into the exterior in a gaseous form. The defecation device was not advised for me. Indeed one of the fundamental precepts for explorers who work in the field is that they carry only the minimum essential equipment and hide it out of the sight of potential observers.

However, we did bring what is known as the “snake skin” in the Trojan Horse project's jargon. Though the process of atomization, the pilot's naked body is covered by a series of different protective aerosols that form an artificial epidermis only a few millimeters thick, which is capable of defending vital zones from possible mechanical or bacteriological attack. Although this second skin could cover one's entire body, due to the fact that we have to be dressed, the chief of the project decided the shield, which is elastic and extremely transparent, be limited to the genitalia and the regions on the neck around the carotid arteries.

Someday this most effective protective suit will be very useful for astronauts, submarine workers, etc. Comparable to a bulletproof vest, it can resist the impact of a projectile similar to an American 22 caliber bullet at a range of twenty feet without interrupting the normal perspiration process. This latter feat is possible due to the filtration of biological chemicals across the porous surface. Project Swivel had developed it (along with other devices that would have made

technicians at NASA pale with envy) especially for the astronauts who participated in the fascinating Marco Polo operation. Here are some of the most exciting inventions.

The mouths and eyes of explorers who travel from our galaxy to other three dimensional frames can be protected by an absolutely revolutionary system. For instance, the first one will be equipped with an optical system that is perfectly controlled by a computer which uses a slow gas that enables the pilot's vision to adapt in the midst of an atmosphere as adverse as the vacuum of outer space.

Now there are miniature acoustic cartridges with built in waves that are excited by a receiver system for gravitational waves. These devices can transmit short messages between members of a group, or as in our case, maintain a permanent communication link throughout an eleven-day adventure. Thanks to these "match heads" which easily fit and hide inside one's ear canal, Eliseo and I knew we could communicate with each other without needing to carry inconvenient radio equipment, which, in any case would have ruined the strict purity of the exploration.

As for the food, in situations where the voyage is long, astronauts are equipped with a double-tubed device, which runs from their lumbar region and through an extremely fragile mechanism that is attached to their lower lip. The tube's interior is lined with a network of cilia that slowly push along a few capsules filled with various concentrated foods. These capsules have an elliptical cross section and are covered by the thinnest film of gelatin, which is very soluble in saliva. When the pilot's eyelids open and close according to a certain sequence, a coded signal is sent to the apparatus in the lumbar region and the capsules are pushed towards the mouth.

The other tube transports a nutritious serum made of different components whose concentrations are continuously regulated. Some of the capsules that generate oxygen and nitrogen—from the transmutation of pure carbon—are even inserted into the nasal passages. Carbon dioxide is also captured by the same device and decomposed into its basic components: carbon and oxygen. The initial energy liberated by the reaction with carbon is used to keep the astronaut's skin warm.

Although our module was built with this equipment, in reality—with the exception of the "snake skin" and the auditory transmission system—we barely used it. The *cradle* was also stocked with a special reserve of food and water sufficient for two explorers for more than fourteen days. For me the issue of the food provisions was not excessively complicated. I had obtained a general idea of the Hebrews' food regimen, as well as those of their Gentile contemporaries who lived with the settlers from Judea, during my two years of intensive training. As a foreigner, my attire and costume were set by the Trojan Horse project as those of a Greek wood and wine merchant. I knew perfectly where my limitations lay in that direction. At any rate, in the event of an emergency, I always had the resort of returning to the module.

On that unforgettable Tuesday, my only exit from the hanger was at dusk. Without knowing how, I maneuvered through the scaffolding where the archeologists were working on the restoration and entered the octagon. It was strange. There I stood alone in front of the small candles which illuminate a stone that so engages the Catholic pilgrims' pious imagination that they can see a footprint which was left behind in it. I asked myself why the Trojan Horse project had chosen this precise mosque, which is named for Christ's Ascension to heaven, as our point of departure for another ascension....

Eliseo and I silently embraced Curtiss and the rest of our colleagues. He did not have many words at this farewell. Everyone was conscious of the historical moment in which we were protagonists and of the hidden dangers that could wait for us on the “other side”.

“Until February 12...” the general murmured with a degree of emotion in his words.

“Good luck!” added the members of the Trojan Horse project.

At 23:00 GMT (Greenwich Mean Time), the *cradle* commenced its liftoff towards a sky whitewashed with stars. In thirty seconds, we reached a height of 800 feet and brought the module into a stationary position. The systems functioned according to plan.

But our ship was not going to travel through space—which is what occurred months later in the Marco Polo project’s expedition where Eliseo and I were under the command of the Chief of Project Swivel and had the task of testing one of those space suits which were especially designed for superior resistance to extreme acceleration and the process of inverting the swivels’ axels.¹

¹ The “grand journey” to the year 30 did not involve a physical translation in space or to another three dimensional frame in the way people usually think of journeys. However, in expeditions immediately after ours, as was the case with the Marco Polo—the astronauts were subjected to the dynamics of extreme accelerations which at some instants reached 245 meters per second each second. Although these peaks in the velocity gradient only last for fractions of a second, the ship as well as the group of pilots must be properly protected. I am not going to go into the details of their adventure, but I will summarize, to a purely descriptive degree, the extraordinary characteristics of their space suits. These were designed and tested, in part, by the Hamilton Standard Division of United Aircraft in Windsor Locks, Connecticut.

Each suit is made of an exceedingly complex membrane, which surrounds the periphery of the astronaut’s body without making mechanical contact with the pilot’s skin. The space between the spacesuit’s internal surface and the human epidermis is regulated by a feedback control system with inputs from the degree of the skin’s capillary circulation as well as the level of perspiration. This system permits the body temperature to maintain its normal value while the traveler engages in physical activity. The suit’s internal components are directed by information furnished by the detector, which measures the physiology of both the circulation and the respiratory systems in addition to the epidermis. The instruments for monitoring physiological status utilize probes that check almost all of the pilot’s organic functions without the need for inserting accessories or devices inside the suit’s fabric. From an assessment of muscular activity, which reveals the levels of glucose and lactic acid; to an analysis of the neocortical activity in the brain, which supplies precise data about the subject’s mental state, the complete range of biological dynamics are registered and recorded through nearly 2.16×10^6 information “channels” or “networks.” A central computer compares these to the standard patterns and issues an appropriate driving response. The suit also features an expanding area—in the shape of a truncated cone for the astronaut’s face, which facilitates natural or artificial vision. The distance from the base of its trunk to the eye subtends an angle of 130° of a sixtieth at a distance of 23 centimeters. Actually it involves a screen that activates artificial vision at particular moments on the voyage. Its entire surface contains 16×10^6 excitable centers which are capable of radiating the entire electromagnetic spectrum 3.9×10^{14} Hertz individually and at different levels of intensity. The binocular’s superior performance is made possible thanks to the prismatic arrangement of each nucleus’ transmitter. A wave registers the electric potential generated by the muscles in both eyes (these are authentic electromyograms) so that ship’s central computer knows the orientation of the axis of each astronaut’s pupil at every instant. More specifically, the excitable prisms that make up the screen are on the microscopic scale. They are set on the surface of a viscous emulsion which allows them to freely rotate. The prisms are controlled mechanically by a magnetic field so half of it responds to the horizontal field component and the remainder responds to the transverse component. One by one, the groups independently orient their faces in the same way two prisms orient their faces (i.e. planes) when a string is pulled which adjusts the angle for the entrance of light. Under these conditions, the “strings” would be both

At 23 hours and 3 minutes, the central computer's electronics were working on inverting the axels of all of the *cradle*'s subatomic particles as well as those on the boundary of the exterior membrane which covered the module. It was pushing the swivels' time axels a few equivalent angles backwards to the desired 709,137 days. In other words, back to March 30 of the year 30¹.

According to what the members of the Trojan Horse Project explained to us when we returned, a tenth of a second after the substitution of our antique three dimensional reference system for a new time, a strong explosion occurred (even I could feel it as I was hovering above the top of Mount Olive) to the joy of our colleagues and the disconcertment of the Israelis.

the magnetic fields and the factor motor, which relays the eyeball's muscular movements to the ship's central computer.

The images produced by the binoculars are in normal relief so the pilots believe they are living in the real world far from the swaddling gelatinous mass which coats certain moments of the trip. In order to prepare for predetermined segments of the flight when the ship will experience great swings in its velocity, the module's interior fills up with a mass of viscous gel. It is a compound, with one low point of jellification, which is held in a hydrosol suspension. In a few cases, its coagulation and reversion into a colloidal sol state is activated thanks to the characteristics of the dissolving agent. In particular, the threshold temperature of 24,611°C must be exceeded in order to transform the agent into a high conductivity electrolyte. Its thixotropic properties are insignificant, consequently whatever dynamical effects occur in the cockpit, such as agitation—will not provoke the gel's transformation into sol. This viscous jelly also performs as a protector or shock absorbing front against expected extreme peaks in acceleration during module tests. Once the circumstances have vanished, the gelatinous mass is removed using a dual effect created by a change in the thermal energy or a change in the ionization controlled by the state of the hydrosol being pumped outside the cockpit [Major's note].

¹ I will spare this diary's hypothetical reader, the details of the complex operation we called "anchorage" which the computer executes at the same time as the axel inversion process. In that fraction of time, the swivels are "shifted" until their angles form an active part of the new barycentric coordinates that are vital for "anchoring the *cradle*" in the correct space complementary to the "now" where we wanted to work. I am not authorized to fully describe this prodigious system of "translation", however, it does establish a future method for covering immense interstellar distances without the need to physically drag oneself through space. In our situation, the *cradle* travelled backwards to 23:00 on March 30 in the year 30 of our era by being positioned and "anchored" at the following barycentric coordinates, in respect to the equator and the average equinox : -0.8361537003739908, -0.5247143520738486 and -0.2302279055872300. Obviously, the sun defines the zero point which divides the axels of the aforementioned coordinates and is estimated by the astronomical unit of distance 1.4597870×10^{11} meters) [Major's note].

THURSDAY MARCH 30

Perhaps there was an instant of high tension. While Eliseo and I were wearing our space suits, we noticed how our heart rate accelerated to the edge of 150 beats per minute. The computer display read 23 hours, 3 minutes and 20 seconds on Thursday March 30 of the year 30. We had "traveled back" a total of 17,019,289 hours.

Gradually, we regained control of our heart rates and focused on the task of maintaining a stationary position and on a general assessment of the ship's systems. Nothing seemed to have changed. An exterior source of infrared light continued fanning us; the altimeter still displayed the initial values: 800 feet above sea level with zero oscillation of the module. During the infinitesimal mass inversion process, the SNAP-10A nuclear battery had continued augmenting the main CF200-2V jet turbine motor. Theoretically, at least, our position had not changed.

Once we had checked the principal circuits, Eliseo and I made our first visual contact with the area. We discerned an immense nuclear luminosity to the west of our position, a little over 1,000 feet away. In spite of the many hours of training, our level of emotion left us speechless. The radar confirmed the profile of a human settlement with a great many low lying buildings and two buildings of superior magnitude. The more massive structure was located on the eastern side of the city; the other even larger building was situated in the southwestern side. We immediately knew it was referring to the grandiose Temple complex, Antonia's Tower and Herod's Palace, respectively. Although it was dark, our guesses were correct: those flickering yellow lights were from the Holy City of Jerusalem. The entire urban center appeared to be surrounded by a rampart. A second wall, whose composition was very similar to the perimeter wall, divided the population of Jerusalem in thirds, exactly from the west of the Temple's façade to the north of Herod's Palace.

To the east and southeast of our module, we also observed two other groups of faint lights. They were infinitely smaller and situated practically on the slope of the same mountain where we were stationed and which we presumed was Mount Olivet. The equipment transmitted a preliminary wave which measured 740 millimeters in longitude and generated unclear images of areas with concentrated human populations. In any case, it was not possible to confirm if, as we suspected, it was indicating the hamlets of Bethany and Bethpage.

After this initial assessment of our immediate surroundings, my brother on the exploration and I executed the second phase of the plan: a new mass inversion with the goal of polarizing the swivels' axles until a limiting hour which would serve as the genuine departure point for our subsequent descent to the peak of Mount Olivet. At 23 hours and 33 minutes, the module "receded" in time, "anchored" at the new coordinates and "appeared" 15 hours before. Although the flow from the atomic generator would have allowed us to sustain the ship's stationary position until daybreak, the objectives of the operation warranted a second inclination of the swivels' time angles until they reached 8 hours 33 minutes on March 30 of the year 30. Even if I did not wish to move the events forward, our earlier sources of information indicated that Friday March 31 was the day that the Teacher from Galilee entered Bethany on his way from the neighboring city of Jericho, which is situated some 34 kilometers from Bethany where Lazarus' family lived. If everything had transpired normally, I must have arrived well in advance of the estimated twenty-four hours.

How can I describe the dawn of March 30 on the sheer slope of the Mount of Olives? The sunrise extinguished the torches in Jerusalem and proffered to our eyes an immense cluster of small tightly huddled white and ocher houses which radiated in a thousand directions along narrow, uneven streets. A formidable rectangular fortress stood out above the mosaic on the eastern side of the city. It was the temple built for Herod the Great with enormous colonnades surrounding spacious atriums and courtyards. They were just as the historian Flavius Josephus described them as one brilliant dome (the sanctuary), which was resplendent as "a mountain covered with snow."

From the north to the south along the bottom of Jerusalem's city wall, we observed a dry riverbed and a sparse brook that we identified as the Cedron. To the east and the southeast, the pit of the Dead Sea was slightly obscured by a dust cloud and therefore lost on the horizon. Its timidly shimmering blue surface was the result of a miracle, which involved the undulations of extremely dry grey ash over the Judean desert. The foothills of Moab were much farther in the background, lost in an implausible blue-green.

Jubilantly Eliseo and I discovered a diminutive rectangle of brown water next to the southern vertex of the walls of the Holy City. According to our maps it had to correspond to the Pool of Siloam. In the same direction, a short distance from the city walls, a hillside juts into the Cedron's riverbed. This site is known as the withered land of Hakeldama where Judas Iscariot's tragic end occurred. Below the module a promontory stretches out parallel to the great eastern wall of Jerusalem. In fact, Mount Olivet is indeed full of olive trees.

With the aid of an environmental sonar probe, the first inspection confirmed an abundance of limestone in the Earth in a wide radius around Jerusalem. Based on a stereographic medium very similar to x-rays, the equipment's analysis verified the presence of vegetation in a belt of land of about 16,650 kilometers. All of the north and northeastern fringes of the city had an extraordinary profusion of gardens, plantations and fruit orchards. To the south, the southeast and especially on Mount Olivet olive groves stood out with higher frequency here and there along side the vineyards. More of these grew on the hill west of the Cedron Valley, which is more precisely, located south of the Temple esplanade, than anything else.

As a curious aside, our device detected a small urban center southeast of the city (later we realized it was referring to the village Erebinthon) whose outskirts contained large garbanzo bean plantations.

A dusty road wound around the eastern face of Mount Olivet, linking the towns of Bethpage and Bethany with Jerusalem. The outlying areas of these hamlets were also studded with palm, fig, and sycamore trees. In the midst of this splendid orchard, our attention was called to the meager flow of the Cedron and more specifically, to a fine trickle of "red" water which flowed at the bottom of the slope of the riverbed that runs beneath the city walls a short distance from the no less celebrated pinnacle of the Temple. (On one of my excursions into the Holy City, I had the occasion to get to the bottom of the mystery of this "trickle" of "red" water.)

Before we made the final descent from the summit of Mount Olivet, my partner and I finished taking the topographical measurements. The results of several of those calculations truly exceeded our capacity for amazement. For example, the dimensions of the Temple were incredible. Its rectangular plot occupied something more than one fifth of the city's surface.

Apparently robust city walls 150 feet high surrounded it.¹ The north face of the city walls runs along side the Gentile's Courtyard, whose western end leans against Antonia's Tower, which was 900 feet tall. The eastern white marble façade of the Temple faced Mount Olivet and reached a height of 1,285.5 feet. The western portion of the city walls had practically the same dimensions as the eastern walls. Finally, the south wall, which enclosed the sacred place, was identifiable from the module by its two wide gates², which rose to a height of 801 feet.

As for Herod's temple, it is true that it emerged from the center of a large rectangle. The instruments obtained the following dimensions for it 578.4 feet wide by 417.6 feet wide. The Fortress of Antonia's Tower, where Caesar's representative stayed during the most important Jewish festivals, stood more than 2,220 feet above sea level. In another feat of superb construction, each of its four corners were flanked by four formidable towers which were 450 feet by 381 feet and 105 feet tall. Herod's family had established their residential fortress in an area to the west of the city at an altitude much higher than Jerusalem's 2,280 feet. The palace and the royal gardens occupied a 900 foot by 300 foot strip of land next to the city walls, but far west of the city. Three spiked towers projected to heights of 120 feet, 90 feet, and 75 feet above the edification.³

Just as our radar had detected the night before, the city wall intersected the center, more or less, of the Temple's western face; thereby dividing the city into two sectors. The definitive dimensions of Jerusalem were the following: the maximum longitude measured from Antonia's Tower to the southern apex was 3,696 feet. At an angle south of the city, next to the Pool of Siloam, we observed an enclosure at a level of 1,980 feet which was much lower than the surrounding land. Measuring from the eastern exterior wall, which coincided with Herod's Palace, to the Temple's pinnacle, the width of the Holy City was 2,667.6 feet.

The impregnable wall that protected Jerusalem rose 225 feet above the valley. (The course of the Cedron varied between 1,860 feet at its lowest level, which was in front of Hakeldama where it flowed under a buttress formed by the city walls south of the city center, to a height of 2,040 feet where it passed in front of the Gethsemane orchard in the foothills of Mount Olivet.)

The result of the computer's calculation of the total length of the exterior city wall appeared on the screen: 11,378.1 feet.⁴ For its part, the wall extended between buildings and thus perfectly divided Jerusalem into two cities that were about 1,446.6 feet long. I had the opportunity to confirm it in person.

Our vantage point on Mount Olivet offered a view of two high peaks, one at 2,220 feet in front of the Pool of Siloam, which is to say, south of the city; the other had one had a maximum elevation of 2,454 feet and faced the Temple. The garden at Gethsemane was located on a peak lower than ours which was 739.2 feet away in a straight line drawn from the side of the Temple's eastern wall.

¹ All of the measurements that the Major mentions in his diary can be converted into meters by dividing by three [JJB's Note].

² There were double and triple gates [Major's Note].

³ Herod named these towers Hispica, Fasacl, and Mariamme, respectively [Major's Note].

⁴ A recent measurement of the perimeter of the exterior city wall recorded a length of at least (approximately) 3,792.7 meters. The interior wall was 482.2 meters long [JJB's note].

Mount Olivet's summit was 2,454 feet above sea level and rose 180 feet above the Temple. That location was linked to ours by a small rocky formation which had broken off the main pinnacle, among the sea of olives. It was here, on this narrow limestone ledge that we established our point of contact.

At ten hours and fifteen minutes the module finally settled on the top of Mount Olivet. In the first rough attempt, the *cradle's* four extendible feet sank quickly between the stone slabs. Eventually the ship stabilized and we proceeded to deactivate the main engine.

Although the residents of Jerusalem or people in the vicinity could not see our descent. An observer, who was relatively close to our point of contact, definitely could have discovered a sudden whirlwind of dust and dirt caused by the collision of the ship's exhaust fumes with the ground during the module's last braking routine. Fortunately, the dust cloud as well as the whistle from the muted jet engine disappeared in a little over sixty seconds.

Despite all of this, Eliseo and I remained on alert for nearly half an hour. We were attentive to any unexpected infrared radiation emission from human beings who may have burst into our vehicle's security field that was fixed at a radius of 150 feet. Whatever human or animal penetrated the terrain bounded by this field would automatically appear on the visual panels inside the module. In the event of a supposed attack, the crewmember inside the *cradle* was authorized to engage a special defense mechanism inside the "membrane" outside of the fuselage—which projected a wall of gravitational waves in a thirty foot dome shaped radius around the ship. Although this protective hemisphere could not be seen, any intruder or intruders who tried to cross it would have the sensation of advancing against a hurricane level wind. (As I have already mentioned, neither of the explorers could cause harm, much less kill members of the society or any observers.)

At eleven hours, after a verification of the surface temperature, 11.6°C, the relative humidity, 57%, the wind direction and intensity: a light northeastern breeze, and other more complicated values of a biological nature, I initiated the preparations for my decisive exit to the outside. While Eliseo continued surveying our environment, I undressed and proceeded to meticulously scrutinize my body. I had to rid myself of any objects from our era such as my wristwatch and the gold chain with my dog tags. I limited myself to my weapon and a small gold ring I always wore on the little finger of my left hand.

Immediately afterwards, I submitted my torso, abdomen, genitals, back, the front and nape of my neck to pulverization by a nozzle, which covered me in the mandated defense we call the "snakeskin". This second skin consists of a thin film whose main ingredient is composed from a compound of silicon dissolved in a volatile product so that it forms a colloidal solution. As this fluid is sprayed over the skin, the liquid rapidly evaporates, leaving a thin coat or a porous opaque film with anti-electrostatic properties. Its color can vary; depending upon the mission; it can also function as a code when working as a group. However, in light of the possibility of disagreeable surprises, I preferred to adjust to a totally transparent "epidermis"....

The Trojan Horse project had scrupulously studied the attire I would wear during those eleven days. In order to make me pass as a distinguished foreign merchant—Greek to all appearances—the experts had constructed two sets of outfits which consisted of a short dark maroon skirt or petticoat, a simple bone colored tunic, a girdle or a belt made of tightly woven Egyptian rope which fastened the tunic and an uncomfortable cloak or cape meant to be wrapped around the body or hung over the shoulders. The annoying *chlamys*, which I was on the point of losing on several occasions during my explorations, had been handmade along with the tunic,

with wool from the Judean Mountains and dyed with woad until they attained a discrete shade of sky blue. For the construction of both tunics, they hired professional Syrian weavers who were the heirs of the ancient trade center at Palmyra, where they still use cold flax linen.

As a precaution against the eventual failure of the auditory transmission device, which I carried around in my right ear¹, the bronze clasp contained a micro transmitter that was capable of emitting short messages using electromagnetic pulses measuring 0.0001385 seconds each. This way I was guaranteed an effective and permanent connection with the base.

In regard to footwear, two pairs of sandals had been designed with esparto grass soles woven in the Turkish mountains of Ankara. Each specimen was hand-drilled and pair of thin cowhide strips was securely inserted into the edges of the soles. The 50-centimeter shoelaces were long enough to comfortably fasten the rustic sandals when they were coiled around my shin four times.

In order to simplify my daily toilette during the "grand journey", I let my beard grow out a month prior to the launch and left it untrimmed. That apparel and my long beard unleashed Eliseo's good sense of humor. As he watched me during those final minutes in the module, I was subjected to all sorts of jokes and jests. These moments of diversion were highly relaxing. They made us temporarily forget where we were and what destiny had reserved for me.

Following one of the popular customs in Palestine at that time, I dressed my hair with drops of oil. It stayed very smooth and sleek in this style. Lastly, I tied a small impermeable oilskin bag to my belt. Members of the Trojan Horse team had placed a Roman pound of gold nuggets inside of it.² The obvious difficulty of obtaining currency that would be legal tender in Jerusalem in the year 30 was surmounted by obtaining grams of gold which had been extracted from the ancient mines of Tharsis located in the Camorras in the foothills of the Iberian Sierras. According to our information, I did not see why I should have had any problem exchanging them for silver denarii and fractional currency such as the *as*, *obolus* or *sesterius*.³

For the umpteenth time Eliseo verified that the transmission system was amplifying the initial reception band from 10,500 feet to 15,000 feet. Prior to the landing, the electronic equipment had measured the distance between Bethany and the Holy City. By following the road, which surrounded the eastern face of Mount Olivet, it arrived at a sum total of 8,325 feet.⁴

The stage where I would move for those days was limited to that between just two communities, Bethany and Jerusalem, with the small hamlet Bethpage located a short distance

¹ However, I could still receive messages from Eliseo directly—always when he considered it timely. When I wanted to open my auditory communication with the module, it was essential for me to press my fingers over the external part of my right ear. In order to avoid suspicion or possible negative interpretations by Jerusalem's residents, the Trojan Horse had established that I would feign a slight deafness in that particular ear. Although communication with Eliseo always had to occur far away from witnesses, this way my gestures toward my ear canal during the transmission were always justified.

² A Roman pound is equivalent to approximately 326 grams [JJB's note].

³ Based on our research of the era, the Attica "state" or Greek gold standard of 8.60 grams would have an exchange rate of 1 to 20 with respect to the silver denarius which was the legal tender in Jerusalem. This small quantity of pure gold, presumably around 758 *denarii* was more than enough money for the eleven days I would stay in that area. For example, if we consider that the price of a small plot of land fluctuated around 120 *denarii*. (Each silver denarius is divided into 24 *asses*. With one *as* it was possible to purchase a pair of birds) [Major's note].

⁴ This is approximately equivalent to 2,275 meters [Major's note].

from Lazarus' town. Presumably this was because my maximum distance from the *cradle* (which was settled in an enclave equidistant from both town centers) must never exceed three miles. The range established for the transmission and reception of auditory signals between Eliseo and I was more than sufficient.

At twelve hours and the end of an emotional embrace, my copilot activated the steps and I jumped to the ground. As I was walking on land whitened by the midday sun, my first concern was to check my position on top of Mount Olivet. I advanced a few steps towards the little forest of olive trees, which were scattered, to the south and I wondered why there was such a great silence scarcely broken by the whirring dragonflies. Judging by the path made by the yellowish group of rocks that the module had landed on, I must have been a little more than ninety feet away from Eliseo. My brother's words sounded loud and clear in my ears.

"It is very possible that the reason for this silence is the *cradle's* presence," Eliseo reasoned. "Despite the coverage, some of the animals have been able to detect the wave emissions..."

Somewhat calmer, I pursued my search for reference points which would be vital for a potentially hasty return to the ship. Although the micro transmitter in my buckle was activated at the same time as the omnidirectional radio beacon (via an ultra high frequency signal) for one of the radars on board the ship to receive my uninterrupted "echo" within a radius of fifty miles, I was not authorized to carry a system for finding the invisible module. Naturally, those in charge of the Trojan Horse thought it ill-advised for my mission to include one of the manual beacons which operates at a frequency of 75 megahertz as a part of my slight impediment. It would have been very useful for re-entering the *cradle*. In short, I had to manage by using my sense of orientation at least until I reached the edge of the ship's 150 foot security zone. Once I was inside that circle, Eliseo could guide me through the transmitter inside my ear.

Thank goodness, the "point of contact" was on one of the lower peaks of Mount Olivet. This combined with the presence of the stony landing site, made it relatively easy to find our vehicle. I could have climbed up the eastern slope (which ended in Bethany) or up the western slope, which merged into the Cedron's creek bed.

I fleetingly surveyed my attire and cautiously stepped into the olive grove. On my right hand side, between the ancient twisted olive branches, I discerned the Temple's golden dome and a large section of Jerusalem's city walls. Despite my intense desire to approach the eastern edge of the "mountain of olives" (which is also what the Israelites call Mount Olivet) and enjoy the unparalleled view of the spectacular Holy City, I stuck to the set itinerary and started my descent down the southern slope in search of the road we had seen from the air. It would lead me to Bethany.

Suddenly, as I was leaning down to dodge one of the leafy branches, a quick shock warned me by calling my attention to my shoes. They were suspiciously clean to belong to a restless foreign trader who was fond of travelling. Without hesitation, I sat down at the foot of one of the old olive trees, I cast a glance around me and grabbed several handfuls of that spongy ochre soil and rubbed it over my sandal's soles and straps.

The module registered the road's unexpected elevation and Eliseo was concerned for my safety.

"Jason, is there a problem?"

Beginning with my exit from the *cradle* this was my war signal. The name “Jason” had been taken from a hero of the Thessalians and the Boreads, who was the leader of the famous expedition of the Argonauts, which was sung by the Greek poet Apollonius of Rhodes and written in Latin by the bard Gaius Valerius Flaccus. I had accepted this pseudonym, however I was conscious that I never had the nature of a hero and my mission with the Trojan Horse project was not exactly a search for the golden fleece in which I had to exert an extra effort to be as good as Jason.

After I had explained the momentary setback to Eliseo, I continued the hike as I remained constantly alert for my first encounter with the local inhabitants. When I had walked just over three hundred paces, I left the olive grove behind. A meadow shaded by two enormous cedar trees which were almost forty meters tall, opened before me.

My heart pounded in my chest. There were four large tents under the trees. For several seconds I did not know how to react. I remained motionless. Indecisive. Numerous individuals bustled under the tents’ dark canvas top.

I pressed my right ear and Eliseo instantly turned up.

“What’s there?” my partner asked.

“First human contact in sight. They seem to be selling merchandise. I see some flocks of sheep next to various shops.”

Eliseo consulted the historical database, which was kept on the *cradle*’s central computer. He read me the information that appeared on the screen.

“Santa Claus¹ here. According to the Book of Lamentations (Kings I [2:5-2:2(44a)] and the rabbinical writings in Ta’Anit Book 4 [1:1-91], in the extreme southern foothills of Mount Olivet, where you are now, there is an established group of traditional vendors that sell the supplies used for sacrifices and purification rites in the Temple. Based upon this information, you will also find a store selling sacrificial pigeons under one of the two cedar trees. Their approximate sales volume is forty shekels per month. This is forty pounds or, if you prefer, sixty kilograms of pigeons.... Santa Claus also mentions a text by Flavius Josephus *The Jewish War* [Volume 12: 2-505], which describes a stonewall built by Titus when he built a fence for Jerusalem. This wall leads to Mount Olivet and surrounds a hill as well as a far away as a rock called “pigeon rock”. It is very probable that the pigeons are from the rock in that region...”

“Message received. Thanks. I am going to approach them.”

“One moment, Jason,” Eliseo interjected again. “This information could be useful. Santa Claus adds that, according to the rabbinical Menahot (87a), those sheep came from Moab; the lambs came from Hebron, the calves and the doves originated in the Royal Mountain or Judea. The bovine livestock came from the coastal plains which include Jaffa and Lydda. Part of the cattle arrived from the Transjordan, possibly the sheep. The dominant languages used among the merchants are Aramaic, Syrian and maybe some Greek.”

“Okay”

¹ This was our nickname for the module’s central computer [Major’s note].

“Good luck!”

I agreed. As I walked toward the stores, my excitement increased. This could be my first opportunity, not only to strike up contact with the Israelis, but to also practice my Galilean, Aramaic or my Greek.

When I entered the market, an indescribable stench—a mix of woolen livestock, humidity and cooking oil—was on the verge of playing a dirty trick on me. They had packed about 250 lambs and sheep under the blackened, patched canvas tarp. The fourth store had lines of huge earthenware jars filled with flour or oil. Beneath the tarp of the last shop a group of men dressed in red, blue and white tunics sat in a circle on top of their cloaks. A short distance outside canvas’ shade, several women labored around a bonfire. Virtually all of them wore green tunics. Nearby half-naked children with shaved heads helped themselves to what I assume was the community lunch. An extra large pot was anchored by three feet of iron around its belly bubbled over the fire. Many teenage girls, who had their faces covered with white veils and headbands around their foreheads, knelt in front of rectangular stones. Each girl mechanically took a handful of grain from a sack setting next to the group and placed it on the surface of a slightly concave stone. Then she grasped a narrow stone with both of her hands and ground the handful of wheat. One of the women passed the resulting flour through a sieve with a wooden ring and put the product into a glazed earthenware tub.

For a few minutes I lingered, engrossed in the scene. The clan had already noted my presence. After they exchanged some words among themselves that I could not catch, one of the men stood up and walked towards me.

The merchant, who was most likely one of the oldest, pointed to the herds and asked me if I would like to purchase a lamb for the incipient Passover. As the man spoke, he revealed a set of teeth decimated by cavities. I smiled and, using the same common Aramaic he had used to question me, I explained that I was a foreigner who was only passing through on my way to Bethany. When he perceived my accent as well as my attire was, in effect, that of a Gentile, the Hebrew groaned, stood up and made a moue of disgust at being in the presence of this “impure one”. He turned around and rejoined the rest of the traders.¹

An instinctive sense of caution made me distance myself from that place as I moved farther downhill in search of the desired road. As I crossed in front of the second cedar where—just as the computer had “predicted”, there was a fifth store with numerous stacks of caged doves. I barely paused. However my spirit had recovered its confidence from the test. It would not have been terribly difficult for me to understand and make myself understood to this Israeli but I did not want to tempt my luck.

The sun continued running west, dangerously cutting my available time on Thursday March 30. I must hurry in order to enter Bethany. At 18 hours, 22 minutes the sun would set at its final point on its journey over Judea. By then, I must have the results of my contact with Lazarus’ family.

I quickened my steps and straightaway I was standing on the cornice of a small terrace. Here Mount Olivet’s foothills terminated. The road, which joined Jerusalem with Jericho by way of Bethany, was five to six meters from my feet. From my improvised watchtower, I could

¹ Gentiles could not participate in the traditional offerings of the Jewish Passover [Major’s note].

distinguish groups of travelers coming and going in each direction. The majority of them were pilgrims either entering the Holy City or en route to their campsites after being walled up. A sheltered mass of shops and improvised stalls extended along both sides of the dusty road all the way to the horizon.

I slipped away onto the road and communicated my intention to proceed towards the east, in other words, in the direction opposite to Jerusalem. Suddenly, I realized these people were almost entirely Galileans who were arriving in successive caravans and, following the ancestral custom, camping only on this side of the city. The observance of Passover was the most serious event of the year. Hundreds of Israelites from different provinces and foreign lands gathered in Jerusalem. Moreover, that year the solemnity was doubly important because Passover coincided with the Sabbath.¹ Lodging in Jerusalem must have been extremely difficult; consequently pilgrims found accommodations in the surrounding vicinity.

I saw dozens of women and children between the stores who were involved in animated conversations or assiduously adjusting their fragile tents, which were made from animal hides and multi-colored fabrics. Despite the fact that they were not required to participate in the festival, it was clear that the whole Jewish family traveled together to the Holy City. And they stayed there for days and nights before the rites of sacred offerings and Passover Seder.

As I walked through this happy diverse and talkative multitude, I began to understand how triumphant the entrance of Jesus of Nazareth into Jerusalem would have been—actually was going to be—in the early Sunday afternoon.... I felt a deep contentment. None of the pilgrims or campers who crossed my path showed the least sign of amazement when they saw me. However, my uneasiness grew as I detected a group of mounted soldiers at the end of the road. They belonged to the Roman garrison in Jerusalem and were probably returning to their quarters in Antonia's fortress.

As a half-hearted precaution, I feigned weariness and sat down by the side of the trail in front of one of the shops. I instinctively raised my hand to my ear and lowered my voice as I communicated with Eliseo about the nearby patrol.

My brother consulted the computer and supplied me with some data about the soldiers: "It must be a small unit—a squadron—which consists of twenty-three mounted soldiers. The legion at Caesar's military base has 5,600 men, 120 of these are members of the cavalry. The presence of a fourth squadron in Jerusalem can signify that Pontius Pilate has already moved from his residence in Antonia's Tower in order to administer justice during Passover..." Eliseo added, "Watch out! *Santa Claus* says the cavalry originated in the Germanic lands. It is from a very low social extraction and its conduct is especially aggressive towards the Jews. Each one of the units rides with three cavalry officers at the front of the line."

Santa Claus' warning was correct. The cavalry advanced along the path by moving the careless out of their way with the sharp iron bases of their heavy javelins or lances. I counted a total of 33 soldiers; all of them were perfectly uniformed in dark chainmail coats, shiny golden helmets, armored greaves, long swords attached to their belts, and hexagonal shields with metallic

¹ According to the Hebrew laws "everyone was required to appear before god in the Temple unless they were deaf, mentally incapacitated, a minor, an eunuch (of indeterminate gender), androgynous, disabled, sick, elderly or unable to climb up the mountain to the Temple". The school of Shammai defined a minor as a boy "who is (still) unable to travel from Jerusalem to the Temple's mountain on horseback while being held in his father's arms" [Major's note].

borders. The entire cavalry was dressed in very tight reddish colored pants, which were adjusted so that they went down to the middle of their legs.

They marched in columns three abreast and as a result, occupied nearly the entire road. As they passed by at my eye level, I was astonished to observe how, with the exception of the leaders of cavalry officers, all of them were very young—maybe between eighteen and thirty years old... Of course I could not concede too much to this impression. In the year 30, the promise of life could waver around the age of forty...

The armed cluster was flanked by a trio of soldiers on dappled horses who had javelins tied on both sides of their horses' backs. Some of the javelins were much smaller than the arrows they carried on their right hand sides. Perhaps they were two meters longer.

As a consequence of viewing this procession with my own eyes, for the first time I truly realized that I had travelled back in time and the setting really was Palestine under Emperor Tiberius! How difficult it turned out to be for me to accept this idea! I prepared to stand up and return to the road, I felt the slight pressure of a hand on my shoulder. I turned around and discovered a brown boy with deep black eyes. He was dressed in a short wide-sleeved tunic of an indefinable color. A wooden bowl of water was in his left hand. Without saying a single word, he smiled and extended the dark container towards me. I wet my lips in the water and returned the vessel as I expressed gratitude for his gesture.

"Where are you from?" I asked as I affectionately rubbed his shaved head.

The child twisted toward a small group of men and women who rested inside a tent. One of the women—who may have been his mother—made a gesture with her hand which encouraged him to respond.

"We are from Magdala, Sir."

"That's near the lake, isn't it?"

The boy nodded.

"Have you heard of Jesus from Nazareth?"

Before my young friend managed to reply, one of the men walked up. He appeared to be 35 or 40 years old with an abundant, shiny black beard. He took the child by the arm and asked me, "Are you one of the *tekton*'s followers?"

This word confused me.

"Pardon me, friend" I replied, "I am a foreigner and I don't understand what that words means."

The man released the boy, crossed his arms over his cloak and explained, "We know his father Joseph who is a carpenter and a blacksmith. And that's what we also call his son."

I was tempted to join this family and postpone my entry into Bethany, but I thought twice and determined no one was better than Lazarus and his sisters for introducing me to the Teacher...

While I continued walking, I asked Eliseo if he could obtain information about this new name for Jesus. *Santa Claus* was very concise: According to the translation of the word in the rabbinical treatise, Shabbat (31a), the Galilean actually acquired the appellation “*tekton*” on account of his being a carpenter, builder or blacksmith. Mark (6:3) also makes an allusion to a *tekton*.

It is possible that once I passed the halfway point between Jerusalem and Bethany, I left the cramped camps of the Israeli pilgrims behind. From then on, the tents were scarcer. If I was not mistaken, I could have sworn that there were more than a thousand improvised shelters outside the entrance to the Holy City. With an average of six or seven people in each tent, this could have represented about six or seven thousand pilgrims.

However, in the final kilometer, I did not observe a reduction in the intense traffic of people and beasts of burden. Groups of Jews with donkeys and the occasional camel continued flowing one after the other, transporting firewood and heavy pointed jugs or guiding goatherds.

The vegetation on both sides of the road was flourishing exceedingly well. On my left, cedar, olive, and divers sycamore trees obscured the eastern side of Mount Olivet. On my right, my attention was called to a succession of cinnamon bushes; they grew next to the palm and fig trees, and had extraordinary fragrant budding violet colored flowers on their racemes.

The fact that I was not allowed to wear a watch worried me. Therefore, it was not easy for me to determine the current time of day. The sun had already dropped toward the west, but I was ignorant as to how much time had passed since I had left the *cradle*. Then again, I wanted to get accustomed to my new situation as soon as possible, and this required me to abstain from making an auditory connection with Eliseo as much as it was feasible. Judging from the length of road I had covered and the times I had stopped, it must have been 1:30 pm when I passed the only curve on the trail. I spied a tiny cluster of houses on the left. Below and to the right, I also saw another village; it looked much larger than the first one. I enthusiastically quickened my pace. Those towns had to be Bethpage and Bethany, respectively.

As I approached the first hamlet, my disillusionment grew. Bethpage was nothing but a miserable huddle of one-story houses. Their walls were made of stones—probably basalt—the gaps between the stones were poorly filled with pebbles and mud. With the exception of one or two flat roofs, out of the twelve houses, the majority had been covered with tree branches, which were reinforced with layers of rushes and straw.

The hamlet was full of fig trees and small kitchen gardens, where an endless number of chickens roamed. The most recent heavy rainfall in January and February had transformed the “streets” into a bog. I was disappointed. I left at once and went back to the trail. I informed Eliseo of my tour of the miserable Bethpage and my imminent arrival in Bethany. The distance between both villages was more than seven or eight hundred meters.

In contrast, Lazarus’ and his family’s residence had a more well-built and refined appearance. Although the houses were modest, each of them had a yard; almost all of their walls were whitewashed and had been constructed with carved stones. As I entered the village, I was surprised when I saw some of the streets were paved with cobblestones. However, other streets were still covered with mud and narrow torrents, which at that time were fetid.

Bethany's town center extended to the right of the road that led to Jerusalem and Jericho. On the opposite side of the trail, a group of the smallest houses leaned on the slope of Mount Olivet. Several of these homes were practically embedded in the side of the mountain. Many groups of Jews were coming and going between their houses, here they formed circles outside the doorways of other homes or under the shade of frameworks built from reeds and branches and covered by climbing ivy, where they rested naked under interminable grape vines.

It did not take me long to deduce that this level of excitement had become common in Bethany after the Teacher from Galilee performed the miracle of raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. The news had run like a trail of gunpowder throughout the realm and arrived as far as the neighboring Syria and the Phoenician coast. After this, an incessant current of Jesus' sympathizers and followers, or Lazarus' friends visited the resurrected man's house with the singular need to satisfy their curiosity. The stream of inquisitive callers had increased successively these days due to the approaching observance of Passover. The road between Jerusalem and Bethany could be covered in less than an hour when travelling at a good pace and this was evidenced by the exhausting congestion throughout the streets of what, until then had been a quiet place.

It was not very difficult to find Lazarus' house. I managed to follow one party of Jews that was about to enter Bethany. In a few minutes I found myself almost on the outskirts of the town center in front a large house and its surrounding lands. A door with ornately carved stone lintels and door jams was set in a neat, whitewashed façade. The front yard consisted of a small garden, which was five, or six meters long and about six or seven meters wide. A man sat in the garden on a stone bench in the shade under the foliage of a fig tree. He was dressed in a tunic with red and blue vertical stripes and long, wide sleeves. About thirty men were gathered around him. Some of them sat at his feet. They listened and contemplated the words of a man with a sere emaciated body and a face scared by smallpox. It was Lazarus!

A shudder went from my head to my feet. I tried to open a path though to him, but it was useless. No one was ready to give up his place. Lazarus had become the biggest attraction those days. He responded to all of the questions they posed with a tired voice—as if he were repeating the events of his worn out adventure for the umpteenth time.

I looked over the heads of the crowd and observed that he was relatively young it was plausible that he had not reached his fortieth birthday. However his pale complexion and the pronounced bags under his eyes aged him significantly.

Despite my desperation, in a few minutes Lazarus stood up and dismissed the assembly. I watched him disappear into the semi-darkness of his house, while the Hebrews gesticulated and dispersed as they commented on everything they had seen and heard. And that left me feeling overwhelmed and alone in front the small wooden fence which surrounded the garden. What must I do? Enter the house? Wait, but why and for what?

I let myself collapse in the humid little open yard in front of Jesus' friend's abode and tried to cover myself with the cloak. I began to feel the cool evening breeze. Then I realized I had not ventured to eat a bite of food and, based on the sun's position, it must be the time of day the Israelis call the "ninth hour". In other words it was three o'clock in the afternoon. At that moment, I understood why Lazarus had ditched his animated circle. It was time for the main meal: the one we call dinner.

Nevertheless, I did not allow myself to be dragged down by despondency. The Trojan Horse project had planned for me to attempt an interview with Lazarus in the course of this Thursday and that is how it had to be. I waited.

I considered using those minutes—while the family regained their strength, to purchase some provisions, but I immediately desisted. In my haste to arrive in Bethany, I had not taken the precaution of entering Jerusalem and exchanging a portion of the gold nuggets for money. To tell the truth, in those instants it was not hunger that I was obsessing about. My eyes were fixed on the door; I was alert for the sudden appearance of any member of Lazarus' family.

My intuition did not betray me. A half an hour had not passed when a woman whose face was covered with the traditional veil, burst out of the back of the house and into the garden. Two teenagers accompanied her. The large matron lightly balanced a reddish jug on top of her head. She must have been surprised to see me. I knew very well that the customs in Jewish society did not permit a man to entertain a woman alone, not even to smile at or talk with her, nor for her to talk to strangers. Therefore, I vanquished my natural inclination to stand up or to greet her and kept silent as I permitted her to pass by me. The good woman averted her eyes, quickened her pace and disappeared by one of the streams which flowed past the yard.

I suppose something strange must have been noted about my presence since within minutes, one of the boys returned at a run and entered the house like a meteor. Immediately, two men and the teenager appeared on the threshold of the garden. Undoubtedly, the boy had alerted them about the foreigner who was seated next to the white picket fence. I rose to my feet and waited. The men, who were wrapped in thick cinnamon colored cloaks, walked towards me.

"What are you looking for, Brother?" asked a man who seemed to have a singer's voice. His tone soothed me. He had a noble gentleness in his countenance.

"I am called Jason and I am from Thessaloniki. I am here seeking the Rabbi from Galilee..."

"He is not here."

I feigned great vexation, stared my interrogator in the eye and vehemently demanded, "Where can I find him?"

"What do you want him for?"

"I am a foreigner, but I have heard talk about him from Antioch to Corfu. I have travelled many leagues because I'm a man who is not satisfied with the Roman or the Greek gods and because I want to know the doctrine of the rabbi called Jesus."

"Why are you searching for him here, in front of Lazarus' house?"

"Ever since my arrival at the coast of Tyre, I haven't heard people talk about anything else besides the Rabbi's ultimate miracle. They say he brought his friend Lazarus back to life after he had died five days earlier..."

"It had been three days since my Lord, had been taken to the tomb," a servant corrected me.

“Of course, that’s true,” I added with an intentional display of joy. Before he could interrupt me again, I asked if I could be seen by Lazarus.”Maybe he knows where I can find the Teacher.”

The men exchanged a quick look.

“Wait here,” they concluded. “The owner has not fully recovered...”

I settled down while the servants disappeared inside the house. In view of the impending possibility of my first meeting with Lazarus, I took advantage of those seconds of solitude to inform the module about what was happening. I must have made a good impression on Lazarus attendants. In a few minutes they invited me into the house.

As I crossed the threshold, I had an ambivalent feeling of simultaneous excitement and timidity. What I had supposed was the building’s façade was in fact the wall of an atrium or small interior courtyard. From what I could observe, this farmhouse was much more extensive than I had imagined. In the center of this rectangular atrium, which opened to the sky, was a pool three meters long. The floor was laid with red bricks which appeared slightly tilted and striated so that rainwater would fall from the building’s eaves on both the left and right and then flow into a central location. Both structures were the same height as the façade wall which was approximately four meters high. Eventually I learned that the building on the right was actually a stable and the one on the left was a storage room for equipment, harnesses and plowshares.

At the other end of the atrium, six meters from the gate I had entered, another door opened almost face to face with the main door. There I waited for the man I had seen under the fig tree an hour earlier. Three men stood beside him. All of them were dressed in loud-colored clothes. Each man wore a cloth band wrapped around his head with the ends of the cloth falling over his right ear, just as I had witnessed among many of the Galilean pilgrims. All of them had dense beards, but with perfectly trimmed mustaches. In contrast, Lazarus maintained a clean-cut hairstyle with short, even prematurely grey hair.

The servants invited me to approach their patron. As I reached his height, I forgot to extend my hand. Lazarus and his companions remained motionless as they examined me from head to toe. It was a difficult moment. Much later I understood how their coldness was justified. After the resurrection, Jesus’ enemies—especially the Pharisees and other distinguished members of the Sanhedrin came to demonstrate a pronounced hostility towards their neighbor from Bethany. If the Nazarene had already constituted a threat to the priests of Jerusalem, Lazarus with his return to life—had revolutionized the spirit which established exceptional proof of the Teacher’s power. Hence it was logical for the family to distrust everybody and everyone.

Fortunately for me, this tense situation was alleviated as soon as my host became aware of my strong accent, which revealed me as being a foreigner.

“Are you looking for me?” Lazarus intervened with the serious gesture.

“I have come from foreign lands in search of the Levi from Nazareth who is known for being just and wise. I disembarked here because I know you are his friend. That is why I am here: I am looking for your understanding...”

Lazarus did not respond. He beckoned me to follow him. And as I moved through the second door, I encountered a spacious portico patio which was also open to the air, but square.

This one was, without a doubt, the main part of the estate. A total of fourteen stone columns, which were a little more than two meters tall, supported a second story that was entirely constructed of bricks. The house's lower façade (the one located next to the gate) had been built with huge rectangular stones. I could count up to seven ash colored solid wooden doors. A second reservoir had been dug into the center of this courtyard. Its four corners divided the stone into small identical channels which, I suppose, were made to collect rainwater. The pool was practically full of water of a questionable color. Nearby, a small waffle screen roof with grape vines climbing on it covered half of the patio. Lazarus' father had brought these vines from as far away as Corinth on the coast of Greece. During my stay in Bethany, I had the chance to learn that Jesus of Nazareth had a special predilection for the fruit from these vines.

Lazarus and his friends walked across the patio's cobblestone floor and made their way to one of the doors on the left. He walked supported by four women and sat on one of the four stone benches, which were placed in each of the four corners of the façade, under the cloister. All of the women were dressed perfectly in bright colored tunics—mostly green—and their heads were covered with scarves. However, none of them had their faces covered.

I have always kept a pleasant indelible memory of that rectangular room that led me to his friend Jesus. The moments that elapsed there were the most tranquil times during my incursions into Bethany...

It was due to the intimacy of the "family" room, which was a kind of living/dining room, eight meters long by four and a half meters wide. The three narrow windows stretched almost the entire height of the wall opposite the door and barely let the brightest light enter. A white pine table presided in the center of the estate on a floor that had been plastered with mortar.

A small number of logs cackled in one corner, these were aided by the strong draft from the hearth. The stove satisfied a double mission. For one part, it served as a heater during the rough winter months and, for the other, it facilitated the food preparation. For the latter duty, the owners had raised a chimney, strictly speaking, a circular low wall a short distance away which was only thirty centimeters high and was composed of four alternating layers of mud and debris. They placed pots of stew on top of the coals as well as deep convex troughs that they used for cooking cakes made with unleavened dough. When the women wanted to cook without the direct application of fire, they positioned flat stones over the flame. Once the coals were hot, they were isolated and the stew was made over the stones.

Nearly all of walls were utilized as cupboards or wooden shelves with bricks, trays, soup bowls and other equipment, most of it was made of clay or bronze, lined up on them.

I saw two huge domed reddish vats buried in the floor opposite the stove. They were somewhat greater than a meter tall and, from a remark Martha made to me some days later, that was where they stored the food and wine destined for daily consumption. Lazarus and his family held one of them in particular in great esteem. It had been rescued many years ago in the vicinity of Hebron City and had belonged to the king's vineyards. This was attested to by the royal seal present on one of its four handles. A meticulous inspection corroborated that the earthenware jar in question did have a high quality imprint of the letters "mlk" which meant "property of the king" Its prior cargo, which was appreciably inferior for an earthenware container destined for wheat—was two Israeli peasants.¹ It was always hermetically sealed with its clay lid secured with strips of cloth.

¹ This volume is equivalent to twenty-two liters [Major's note].

The ceiling of the room was two meters high and crossed by six wooden beams, which were most likely from conifers as they were the most abundant tree in that region. The other sections of the house's roof, with the exception of the terrace, were less solidly constructed. For example, the living room and the storage rooms for common field equipment had been covered with very combustible materials—namely straw mixed with clay and lime. Lazarus told me how this variety of roof entailed great inconvenience. Each time it rained, the roof had to be smoothed down again in order to consolidate the material on its surface and avoid leaks. For this task they used small stone rolling pins about seventy centimeters wide.

Lazarus and the rest of the people had seated themselves around the fire on top of goat skins which carpeted the floor. I sat down too and I was ready to talk. At that moment, a woman entered the living room. She held a fragile flaming splinter in her left hand. Without saying a word, she circulated among the six clay oil lamps that hung along the white walls. After lighting them, she took a clay chandelier and inserted the flame of her improvised torch into its bell-shaped opening. Instantly, yellow flames flared up. She walked diligently to the table and set the portable lamp on the far end, closest to the group. As she leaned over the hearth, she tossed the remains of the splinters and two resinous marbles into the fire. These were capsules of cassia; a perfume frequently used by the Hebrews. When they burned, a vapor permeated the area with a soft enduring fragrance.

Then suddenly, with the barest interval of twilight, darkness filled the historic lodging.

"We beg you to forgive our suspicion," one of Lazarus' friends requested. "Ever since the high priest, Joseph ben Caiaphas and many of the high priests from the Sanhedrin¹ decreed an end to the Teacher's life, all of our precautions are insignificant..."

"We know Ben Bebai's² henchmen and the Boethusians made up a third of the audience present at the meeting. They have orders to seize Jesus. The observance of Passover is coming and our informants are sure the batons and cudgels of the Great Sanhedrin's police will be ready to fall on the Rabbi. They are only waiting for an opportunity. "

"Why?" I interrupted as I displayed an eager desire to comprehend. "According to my understanding, the Teacher is a peaceful man. He has never done anything bad to anyone..."

¹ That night Eliseo clarified the significance of the high priests during my contact with the module. The Sanhedrin referred to a populous group of head priests who held permanent positions in the Temple and who, by virtue of these positions, were the voice of the Sanhedrin. *Santa Claus* provided supplementary documentation: *The Works of the Apostles* (4:5-6) and the *Antiquities of the Jews* by Josephus Flavius, which mentioned that the Temple's supreme director and treasurer were both members of the Sanhedrin. The minimum number of members required for this group was one (the high priest), plus one (the supreme director of the Temple), plus one (the Temple's guardian high priest) and three more (treasurers). This is to say, six people. Unemployed priests, guardian priests and treasurer priests were added to this minimum number. Hence the Sanhedrin consisted of 71 members.

² The module's central computer confirmed a person with the name Ben Bebai as one the Temple's directors with the specific position of bailiff, based upon the Rabbinical writings of the Shekalim (V:1-2). This official was responsible for, among other things, administering the whip to priests who, for example, attempted to cheat in the draw for performing the functions of worship. His other duties were the fabrication and placement of threads, which were utilized in the production of underwear and old belts for the priests [Major's note].

Lazarus must have noticed a special vibration in my voice. That was the first step towards the definitive opening of his heart.

“You are Greek,” the resurrected man replied; thereby giving me the understanding that I was ignorant of most of the circumstances, which surrounded the Rabbi from Galilee. “So you don’t know about the prophecy which our village has nurtured and contemplated since the ancient times. One day a Messiah who will free the people will be born in Israel. Well, now the priest caste believes this and has caused the village to believe that this Savior will have to be foremost and above all, a high priest.

“The Messiah will be a member of the Great Sanhedrin. This is what they say, Long years of foreign domination has strengthened the hope for this Messiah who has been transformed into a political leader who will free Israel from the Roman yoke. The high priests know the Teacher preaches for another type of “liberation” and so they consider him an imposter. This is sufficient to terminate Jesus’ life. But there is more...”

Lazarus continued observing me with eyes that were brilliant from a progressive and uncontrolled choler.

““Whitewashed tombs’ is what the Teacher calls them and they did not pardon Jesus for publically ridiculing them. It was the first time in many years that someone has stood firm, faced them and consequently undermined their influence over this simple village. Jesus drew crowds with his words and signs and this multiplied the Sanhedrin’s envy and rancor. Thus they have sworn to murder him...”

“But they won’t succeed” interjected another one of the men.

I gave Lazarus an inquiring look. What would they say to these potent words?

The friend who loved Jesus diverted the conversation. “Please excuse out discourtesy. Judging from the dust on your sandals and the fatigue on your face, you must have walked a long way. I beg that you, as our brother, accept our hospitality...”

This abrupt turn in Lazarus’ conduct confused me. But I did not do anything. The man abandoned his place and returned in a few minutes with a woman.

“Martha, my eldest sister,” he explained as he referred to her, “will wash your feet...”

My heart beat strongly. I stood up without realizing the error I was committing. The rest of the group remained seated. It was too late to rectify it. I attempted to calm my nerves. I could not refuse my host’s request, as this would have been considered an insult to the established Middle Eastern sense of hospitality. So I put my hands on Lazarus’ shoulders and smiled as if his refinement was the best I knew.

I had almost no time to stare at Martha, the “lady” as this is what her name actually means. Before her brother had finished speaking, she had already left the living room’s threshold and disappeared through the gate in the courtyard.

Lazarus asked me to sit down on one of the four-legged stools with a wicker seat that were scattered around the table. In five minutes Martha’s figure was silhouetted in the doorway

again. She held an empty pan in her hands. A long piece of white linen was draped over her left forearm. A boy who was carrying a bronze jug full of water followed her.

As if she was in the process of doing the most routine task, Lazarus' eldest sister deposited the basin at my feet and adjusted what we today would call a towel. I hastily untied the leather straps, which formed my sandals' laces while she emptied part of the jar's contents into the basin.

When I inserted my feet into the wide earthenware container, I experienced a comforting sensation. The water was hot!

"Thank you..." I murmured. "Thank you very much."

Martha raised her head and smiled, which led to the discovery of the gold thread that served to hold her false teeth in place. This was another unmistakable symbol of the family's affluent position.

While she proceeded to wash my smelly feet (the four turns of the straps had left red marks on my skin), I began to thoroughly observe her. Without a doubt Martha was older than Lazarus. She appeared to be between 45 and 50 years old, however from what I could ascertain later on, her true age was approximately 37. Her robust, calloused hands reflected a long and hard working life. Martha was very similar in size to her brother who was approximately 1.6 meters tall; however she was stouter with a round tanned face. I doubted that her hair, which was covered by a black veil and fell down her back, was black like her eyes and her eyebrows.

Suddenly, as she held my gaze, she exclaimed, "Jason? We know a Jason. It was some years ago. You have the same voice..."

As she shook her head, she seemed to reject that strange feeling and added, almost to herself, "But it is impossible. That Greek was much older than you."

Once she had finished the washing, Martha wrapped my feet in the linen she had kept around her waist and pressed a smooth fabric, probably cotton against both extremities until they were completely dry. To my surprise, she took my sandals and handed them to the kid. I remained silent, imagining that the good woman would try to clean them.

When I thought the operation had finished, Martha asked me to roll up the sleeves of my tunic. I obeyed and with the greatest delicacy, she took my hands and held them over the pan. Presently Martha directed me to rub my hands together energetically as she emptied the rest of the water in the jar over them. Finally, after I dried my hands, she placed the jug next to the basin. At that moment, the woman of the house, who continued kneeling in front of me, grabbed a thin cord, which hung around her neck and pulled out a jet black cloth bag that had been nestled between her breasts. She opened it and dumped its contents into her left hand. Her handful of the smooth, tiny, tear-shaped granules sparkled in the candlelight. Martha rubbed these over each one of my feet. Then she did the same thing to my hands and returned the fragrant product to her bag.

I could not contain my curiosity: I asked her the name of the perfume.

"It's myrrh."

In the days following my exit from the module, I came to understand that many Israeli women, especially those of the upper and middle classes, carried small bags of myrrh underneath their tunics just like Martha did. It provided an enduring and mostly pleasant fragrance. Myrrh, aloe and the herb from balsam, as well as other aromatic resins, were consumed in great profusion in Jewish towns. They were used not only for incense in the Temple, but also for personal hygiene, in the home and even in bed.¹

Martha and the boy left the room and I rejoined the group. I felt relaxed and grateful. Lazarus poked at the fire. So many questions swarmed in my mind that I did not know where to resume the conversation. I wanted to know the doctrine and the personality of the Teacher from Galilee, but I also felt an acute curiosity about the unique case: a man was returned to life after dying and being buried. Neither was it a question of not taking advantage of this incomparable occasion, it had been planned. Moreover, in the itinerary from General Curtis, it was requested that I ask my kind host about this in order to draw out some of the doubts in regard to Jesus' famous miracle. In spite of the evangelical texts and numerous commentaries, I had collected, up until that moment, due to my medical qualifications it had been difficult for me to imagine how a man who had suffered what today we would call a clinical death and who at the culmination of several days after his demise, had been resurrected from his tomb by another "man".

"What would you like to know?" Lazarus inquired as he continued poking at the fire.

At the risk of seeming impertinent, I planted my first doubt with sufficient cleverness to provoke loquacity from everyone present.

"Could it have been the case that you were sleeping?"

Lazarus forgot the fire, gave me a hard look and retorted, "It is best if they respond to that question..."

His friends were quiet. For a moment, I began to think I had forced the situation. But finally one of them adopted a comprehensive tone and picked up the thread of the conversation.

"It is natural for you to doubt it. You as well as many others were not here at the end of February when our brother Lazarus was seized by intense fevers. Despite his sisters' care and

¹ During my days in Palestine, my investigations verified that even though many of the plants that were used as a base in the fabrication of perfume were grown in Israel, the majority of them originated in other countries. For example, the incense, which was made from boswellia, had made a pilgrimage from Arabia and Somalia. The same thing had occurred with the *commiphora myrrha* or myrrh tree. However the aloe had been brought from an island on the Archipelago of Socotra, which was located at the mouth of the Red Sea. As for the precious balsam, which is known to botanists by the name *commiphora opobalsamun* or the Balsam of Gilead, it seems to have originated in Arabia. Nevertheless, it was well affirmed by Ezekiel (27:17) that 'Judea and Israel supplied Tire with perfumes, honey, oil and balsam'. The Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus gives the explanation in one of his books. According to Josephus, the seeds of the balsam herb had arrived in Palestine during King Solomon's time and were one of the many gifts of the mystic Queen of Sheba to Solomon. On the very next day, Friday, March 31, I had the opportunity to witness how Jesus presented balsamic herbs from the fertile plains of Jericho as a treasured gift to Mary and Martha. Santa Claus also confirmed that it was the year 60 when Tito Vespasian ordered a special guard to protect the balsam plantations in Jericho. A thousand years later, the Crusades, which entered Israel, did not discover a trace of this exceptionally valuable plant. When the Turks had cut down a large section of trees, they had carelessly included the bushes, which had been cultivated close to the Jordan River [Major's note].

prescriptions from Jerusalem, he became increasingly worse. He was extremely weak, so weak that he was incapable of holding a small bowl of milk in his hands.

“Even the Temple physician Ben Ahijah¹ could not cure him. Around that time the Teacher could not be found in Judea. And after the family saw Lazarus in such severe pain, they decided to send a messenger to beg Jesus to heal his friend. However a few days after the rider departed, Lazarus died.”

I intervened, “Do you recall the date?”

“How could I forget the day my friend died? The grief fell over this house in the final hours of the afternoon on Sunday, March 5.”

I interrupted my interlocutor again, “It is significant that when the messenger intercepted Jesus, Lazarus had already died...”

“Indeed. At that time the Rabbi could be found in the city of Bethabara in Perea², so the courier rode all night. Jesus did not receive the news until the following Monday.”

“There is something that I don’t understand. Did the messenger have orders to ask the Teacher to come to Bethany?”

“No, Lazarus sisters and brothers had sufficient faith in the Rabbi to know his presence was unnecessary. They were aware that Jesus could be found preaching and that a single one of his words would be enough to heal his brother. So once Lazarus died, shortly after the messenger’s departure, the whole world recognized and accepted that it was too late.

“The result which was most incomprehensible to me as well as to Mary and Martha was Jesus’ response to the messenger,” continued the speaker in a voice that quavered with sadness as he remembered those moments. “When the emissary returned to Bethany on Tuesday morning, he assured us repeatedly that he had heard the Rabbi say, ‘This sickness will not kill him.’ As I said, everyone was confused about whether or not they were believers. No one could understand why Jesus—who was the family’s greatest friend—had not shown a sign of life.

“As soon as Lazarus’ friends and relatives from neighboring hamlets and Jerusalem knew about his death, they set out on the road in order to attend the funeral and to join the sisters and

¹ Some hours afterwards, Eliseo confirmed that, according to the rabbinical writings of the Shekalim (V:1-2) the name Ben Ahijah appeared in one of the two lists of Temple “leaders” with the specific post of physician. The computer produced the following excerpt, “Recommendations for Abdominal Pains. The Priests’ diets were extraordinarily rich in meat and they rarely drank water. This custom caused frequent abdominal pains.” *Santa Claus* sent us more comprehensive information about the Erfurt manuscript, which at that time, was stored in Berlin. Two days later, as I witnessed Christ’s triumphant but disturbing entrance into Jerusalem, I had the opportunity to verify that one of the professional artisans who resided in the “lower section” of the city was the exact same doctor. I discovered that the Sanhedrims, who Lazarus’ friend mentioned, were concentrated on one of the streets with the rest of the *ûmman* or artisans. This was where they carried out their duties, which spanned from performing the surgical procedure for circumcision to prescribing herbal medicine, and from pulling teeth to shaving and cutting hair [Major’s note].

² This city lies in the eastern part of Jordan and is erroneously cited as the location where John baptized Jesus Christ [Major’s note].

brothers at such sad time. The first part of the mourning ceremony¹ was completed. Our friend was entombed next to his parents in the family crypt, which is located in the back of the garden. “

”Just a moment,” I interrupted again, “Lazarus was buried here, in his own house?”

“Yes, he was interred in the family vault with his ancestors.”

However trivial my question might have seemed, for me it had undeniable significance. According to all of the biblical texts I had studied, prior to Operation Trojan Horse, by exegesis Lazarus’ tomb had been located outside the town, specifically on the eastern slope of Mount Olive. On the next morning, at my request, Lazarus’ eldest sister guided me to the natural cave at the foot of a crag. Its opening was more than ten meters high and four hundred meters from the back of the house at the end of a verdant garden which was part of the estate. This proof dispelled my doubts and strengthened my first impression of the comfortable economic position the family as Lazarus had inherited extensive vineyards and olive groves from his parents. This unquestionable arrangement, which included a family crypt inside the house’s grounds, was only an indication of his brothers’ wealth.

“What day was Lazarus interred?”

“It was on the morning of Thursday, March 9. After completing the three days of mourning required by the laws, Lazarus’ family and friends placed his remains in a stone niche which had been hollowed out of the cave and proceeded to close the entrance with a stone slab.”

My informant recounted the difficult situation, which continued to cross the deceased man’s siblings. Although numerous friends and relatives arrived to console Mary and the “Lady”, the two women still found themselves submerged in profound grief. However, something differentiated the two sisters: while Mary seemed to have lost all hope, Martha continued to cling to one idea: ‘The Teacher would appear at one moment or another.’ Even though she did not know exactly what the Rabbi was going to do at this stage since her brother was dead and shrouded, the Lady lived for four days with the fervent desire to see Jesus appear. The effect the Teacher had on her was such that on the same Thursday morning that the tomb was sealed, she asked a resident of Bethany—who lived high on a hill to the east of the hamlet—to watch over the road which led to Jericho. This was the road the Rabbi must use to travel from Galilee. Within a few hours a teenager burst into Lazarus’ house and secretly warned Martha about the imminent arrival of Jesus and his disciples.

A little after midday the “Lady” met the Nazarene at the top of the hill. When Martha saw Jesus, she sprang to her feet and reigned in her tears as she screamed her charge at the top of her voice.

“Teacher, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”

Jesus bowed, stood upright and said, “Have faith and your brother will be resurrected.”

¹ In the third chapter of the Mishnah on minor ceremonies or festivals, the Moed Katan decrees that the dead were to be mourned for the first three days. The writings also describe the lamentations for the first seven days. Also relatives were required to wear their own symbols of mourning for the entire first month. [Major’s note].

And Martha, who was not brave enough to criticize the Teacher's apparent incomprehensible conduct, replied, "I know he will live in the Resurrection in the final day and I already believe our Father will give you everything you ask him."

The Rabbi placed his hands on the woman's shoulders and stared into her eyes. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus continued as the ensuing tears fell over Lazarus' sister's cheeks, "They who believe in me will live in spite of death. In truth, I say to you that whoever believes in me will never really die. Martha, do you believe this?"

The woman nodded her head. Once she had dried both her eyes, she added, "For a long time I have believed you are the Liberator, the Son of God who lives...the one who came to this world..."

Lazarus' companions continued expounding their story with how the Teacher found it strange not to see Martha with her sister. The "Lady", who had already recovered her usual temperament, described the deep and distressing trance which crossed Mary. And she begged the Nazarene to let her notify Mary about his arrival.

Martha returned to the house. She took her sister aside and shared the news of the Teacher's arrival.

My interlocutor must have noticed my surprise at Lazarus' eldest sister's behavior, and anticipated my thoughts, since he began an explanation.

"We counted some of Jesus enemies among the plentiful guests who had congregated at the house. Martha endeavored to avoid any incident; therefore she considered it appropriate not to publically discuss the Rabbi's recent arrival in Bethany. Furthermore, her intention was to stay in the house with her friends and family while Mary went to search for Jesus. But the younger sister's impetuous and unexpected exit alarmed those present, who then resumed their activities only believing that Mary was on her way to her brother's tomb.

"When she reached the Teacher, he jumped to his feet and she also exclaimed, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died!'

"But the group saw Jesus with the two sisters and stayed a respectful distance away. Many of the friends and family immediately continued with their mourning and lamentations while the Rabbi comforted them. The sun had already begun moving towards the west when Jesus asked Mary and Martha, 'Where is he?'

"The "Lady" answered, 'Come and you will see.' And the two sisters led him away from the house and across the garden. When they were in front of the huge stone Martha pointed to the tombstone, which sealed the family's crypt while Mary was seized by a new paroxysm. She knelt at the Galilean's feet sobbing and rubbing her face in the dirt. This produced a great silence. The ones who were standing close to the Rabbi saw how his eyes filled with tears and as usual, some of the tears ran down his cheeks.

"One of Jesus' friends who saw him crying called out, 'Look at how he loved him. He who has opened the eyes of the blind, couldn't he have prevented this man's death?'

"But other members in the audience were implacable detractors of the Teacher. They used this as an opportunity to taunt Jesus by saying, 'If you had such a high regard for this man,

why didn't you save your friend? What purpose does it serve to heal strangers in Galilee, if you can't save those you love?'

"Nevertheless, Jesus remained silent. Then he pulled Mary to her feet and took her into his arms which alleviated her affliction.

'What time is it?'

'It is almost the ninth hour.'

"At once, the Rabbi directed some of his disciples with an order, 'Remove the stone!'

"But Martha stepped toward the Teacher and asked, 'Do we have to move the stone aside?'"

I questioned Lazarus' friends about the meaning of the "Lady's" inquiry. Frankly, she did not fully comprehend what he wanted to say. Martha, as well as the rest of those present, elaborated for me.

"We understood it to mean Jesus wanted to see Lazarus for one last time. Although all of us believed in the resurrection of the dead, no one (not even Martha) imagined what the Rabbi's true intentions actually were. For this reason, the "Lady" believed it would be sufficient to partially remove the tombstone. Thus the teacher would have been able to take a brief glimpse into the crypt and gaze at his friend's body.

"However Lazarus eldest sister attempted to dissuade Jesus by remarking, 'My brother died four days ago...The body has started decomposing...'

"The five men who were ready to move the stone looked at Martha without knowing what to do. But Jesus, who had positioned himself in front of them, reproached the "Lady's" logical insinuation in a tone, which left no room for doubt.

'Didn't I maintain from the beginning that this sickness was not fatal? Haven't I come to fulfill my promise? And after you have seen this, haven't I said that you will see and believe in the Glory of God? Why do you doubt? How much time do you need to believe and obey?'

"Martha stared at the Teacher and in one of her typical outbursts, urged the apostles and the neighbors from Bethany who had offered to remove the stone from the entrance to the cave.

"The thick silence was only broken by the groan of the circular stone rubbing against the rock and by the intermittent shouts of support proffered by the volunteers during their effort to shift the heavy stone to the side of the hole. After four of five attempts, the mouth of the tomb was exposed.

"Then our Rabbi lifted his eyes to the blue twilight and proclaimed in a voice that all of us could hear, 'Father'¹...I am grateful that you listen to my request. I know you always listen, but since you are here with me, I talk to you so they will believe you have sent me into the world and so they will know you are participating with me in the act we are prepared to accomplish.'

¹ My informants always use the word "Abba" for "Father". According to my studies, this title was awarded to many of the teachers of the Talmud as an indication of veneration and affection [Major's note].

“Next he put his left knee on the ground and leaned into the gallery which led into the funeral chamber and powerfully shouted, ‘Lazarus...Come to me!’

“The echo reverberated inside the cave, while 40 or 50 people stood outside feeling chills going up and down their spines. As we were among those in closest proximity to the Teacher, when we glanced into the tomb and through the shadowy hole, we perceived something shaped like Lazarus body tightly bundled with strips of white linen lying in a lower niche on the right side of the mausoleum.

“Mary clutched her sister in fright. Never was a silence more dramatic. Everyone held his or her breath for a short time. Even though most of us had witnessed the Rabbi’s other miracles, the palpable and crude reality of those four days of interment inclined us to doubt.

“What was going to happen?

“The unaccustomed silence spread to include the surroundings. First, the familiar swallows disappeared from the sky and the strong wind, which is so characteristic of this season, went inexplicably calm.

“Suddenly, the Teacher stepped back. A bulky figure appeared on the steps that led from the mouth of the cave. Mary emitted a tearing scream and fainted. Instinctively everyone receded.

“A man covered with linen struggled to get outside. But his hands and feet were winged with bandages that made it difficult for him to walk.

“As the surprise transformed into terror, the majority of the man and women fled through the garden howling and falling over each other.

“It was Lazarus!

“He was barely supporting himself on his hands and elbows. The bulky shape dragged itself over the damp stone staircase to the final step. There it paused, panting while a cold sweat ran down our faces.

“But no one, not even Martha dared to take a single step toward the resurrected man.

“Jesus understood our panic and advised the “Lady” to remove the strips of cloth which prevented him from walking.

“With her eyes brimming with tears, Martha valiantly approached the form and began loosening the bandages that squeezed his wrists. She continued without hesitation and released the ties on his ankles; she tore the sheet and stopped to uncover her brother’s face. His eyes were open very wide and his complexion was as white as lime.

“Once Lazarus was free, he greeted the teacher and his disciples. Then he asked his sister about the significance of the funeral clothes. And why he had awakened in the garden. While, the “Lady” spoke about his death, internment and resurrection, Jesus turned around and, with his habitual serenity, leaned over and picked up Mary. She had still not regained consciousness. So the Teacher completely forgot about Lazarus, and us, and carried her into the house in his arms.

“A little later, three brothers prostrated themselves before the Rabbi in appreciation for all he had done. But Jesus took Lazarus hands and lifted them up as he said, ‘My son, what has happened will also occur when all of you who believe in the gospel, are born again in a more glorious form. You will be the living testament of the truth which I have proclaimed: I am the resurrection and the life. Now we are going to take nourishment for our physical bodies.’

“This is all we can tell you.”

Lazarus observed me with a fixed stare. I suppose he is a little curious about how I feel about him.

“If you would permit me to—I would like to ask one last question,” I interjected directing it to the resurrected man.

Jesus’ friend nodded his head.

“What memory do you have of those days when you were dead?”

“I have never discussed it,” Lazarus replied, “but there is not much I can tell you about it.”

The question and the insinuation by the owner of the house surprised the group. Oddly enough, no one had been interested in finding out what Lazarus had seen or felt during the four days he had been dead.

“There was moment—I suppose it was the instant of my death—when my head was filled with a strange noise... It was like the buzzing of a swarm of bees. Then I don’t know how much time elapsed. I experienced an unknown sensation; it was as if I was being hurtled through a dark, narrow passage...when I opened my eyes again, I was surrounded by darkness. I didn’t know where I was or what had happened. I felt coldness against my back. It was then I realized I was lying on a stone bed. I tried to stand up, but I noted I was unable to as I was tied up and covered with linen. I tried to scream, but a large handkerchief was wrapped around my head so my mandible was held tightly in place. I immediately understood I was on one of the subterranean niches we use to inter our dead. However, in contrast to what you would believe, I did not feel afraid. On the contrary, a deep peace called out to me and I slowly crawled toward the column of light I discerned from the back of the chamber. You know the rest.”

I do not know how it entered my memory and yet I suddenly remembered the sheet mentioned in the story of the resurrection.

“Although, I risk abusing your hospitality,” I proposed, “I would like to know if you still have the burial clothes.”

“Yes, we do.”

“May I examine them?”

My abrupt interest in the shroud bewildered those present. But Lazarus agreed and asked one of his friends who was outside for them. Minutes later, the man placed a roll of fabric in my hands. With the help of Lazarus himself, who came at my request, we stretched the sheet of linen over the table. Fortunately, the sisters had chosen to keep the linen and the strips exactly as they

were when they were removed from Lazarus' body. Regardless of how vigorously the Judaic law prohibited contact with cadavers or objects which, at some time had been in contact with the remains of people or animals¹, this singular occurrence—which broke all of the legal codes –and the liberal mood of the faithful followers of Jesus' doctrine, had made it feasible that the funeral clothes were not destroyed and the family handled them without any scruples of conscience.

When I passed one of the oil lamps over the fabric, I saw a tear in the center of the sheet exactly in the section, which must have covered his head. As I thoroughly scrutinized the cloth, I could verify the existence of a few brown colored plasters which were the byproducts of the mix of unguents that had been used for the embalming process.

As a doctor, I was especially interested in detecting the possible signs and traces that would indicate the natural putrefaction process. According to my calculations and judging from the information from my friends, Lazarus had died 25 days ago, on the evening of March 5. Despite the isolation in the sepulchral cave, its low temperature and the retarding action of the oils and aloes, Martha's warning to Jesus about the corpse's odor was, without a doubt, a clear indication that her brother was already there when, at least the so called "green spot" on the abdomen, which is the first sign of decomposition, would have appeared. (This spot often emerges 24 hours after death and the moment the tomb was opened, Lazarus had already been dead for ninety hours.)

In any case, no matter how much I inspected the linen, I could not find traces of liquid products from, for example, the rupture of blisters on the epidermis. What I did identify was an odor from some areas on the fabric. It was the unmistakable fume of sulfur emanating as it does from the putrefaction of organic material. Obviously I did not attempt a definitive test, because I had a particular idea about Lazarus possible cause of death. It was most likely an acute generalized infection. (Under a more personal heading, after the "grand journey", I was interested in what all of the texts, traditional, apocryphal, or not, etc. had to say about how Lazarus' luck ran in the subsequent years. The limited data I found pointed to the fact that Jesus' friend died a second time at the age of 64. Curiously, it was as a consequence of the same illness, which had taken him to the tomb in the year 30. But of course the information could not be verified.)

However, what commanded my attention was how Lazarus' friends' testimony completely matched the Judaic tradition about death. The Hebrews generally believe 'the drop of bile on the point of the sword of the Angel of Death begins to act at the end of the third day.' Hence, on the fourth day, the decomposition of the corpse is an unquestionable fact. In accordance with the information from Lazarus' family, the Teacher received news of his friend's serious illness when Lazarus had already been dead for eleven hours—in other words on the morning of Monday, March 6. Jesus knew the Jewish beliefs about death and wisely waited until Tuesday before setting out on the road and arriving in Bethany when Lazarus' body had been lifeless for around 96 hours. This time was more than sufficient for all of the Jews who knew the deceased could not doubt the marvel he was on the verge of performing.

¹ The *Mishnah*, which is the richest ancient Jewish oral tradition, has a sixth chapter dedicated to "Purity". The first chapter of the Ohalot ("Shops") establishes the various rules about the transmission of impurities from cadavers. "If a man touches a cadaver," reads the law, "then he will be impure for seven days and if another person touches him, he remains impure until the next day when the sun rises." I suppose there were some items, in this case linens—which once they had touched a cadaver, the man who touches these objects and all of the equipment he touches at that time, remains impure for seven days [Major's note].

In the succeeding hours, thanks to this or that information, I reached an appreciation of the truth about how the aristocratic Jewish high priests led by the dynasty of the ex-supreme high priest, Annas¹, were searching for a way to kill Jesus of Nazareth. Hours after the resurrection the leaders of the Temple and Annas' son-in-law had received a complete account of the events in Bethany. Meanwhile, the majority of the resurrected man's friends, who had witnessed the exceptional occurrence, were raving to the four winds about the powerful sign from the Teacher of Galilee. Other Jews—though much fewer in number, rushed to inform the caste of Pharisees, who enjoyed a great supremacy over the rest of the priests and the Levites.

It is almost certain that if the miracle had taken place at another time in the Jewish year—and not on the eve of the solemn Passover, and with another protagonist who was less affluent and less prestigious among the dignitaries in Jerusalem, the Levi's deed may have been called a "fabrication" in an already long list of wonders. But the Nazarene had snatched someone from among the dead—a privilege reserved exclusively for the divine. And this someone was Lazarus of Bethany. It was too intimate, too spectacular, too important to be forgotten or condemned to silence.

The act acquired proportions, which, according to the account given to me by Lazarus and his friends, made Jerusalem suffer a concussion. The circumstances were that some of the witnesses to the resurrection were distinguished Jews, members of the Temple and friends of Lazarus who precipitated even greater events. The Sanhedrin, who were disturbed by the news, called an urgent assembly on noon of the following day, which was Friday. The meeting's single topic could be summarized in one sentence: "What are we going to do with the imposter?"

Although Israel's supreme assembly had already debated the possibility of detaining Jesus of Nazareth, judging him and accusing him of blasphemy and transgressing the religious laws on other occasions, this time was different.

One of the Pharisees drew up a resolution, which dictated the immediate capture and execution of the Galilean without trial. This provoked sharp discussions between the seventy-one members of the Sanhedrin, especially in among the "elders" or representatives of the "secular nobility" such as Joseph of Arimathea and the Pharisees. They considered such a decision illegal and abominable.

¹ During the first century A.D., which is the first century of our era, there was a family of high priests who were legitimate descendants of the Zadok branch. (From 37 B.C. to 70 A.D., the first and last acting high priests who were the progeny of the original Zadokites were the Babylonian Ananel, who held the position from 37 to 35 B.C. and for a second time for part of 34 B.C.; and Phannias of Jaffa, a stonemason, who held the post from 67 to 70 A.D. A third legitimate high priest, Aristobulus III, ruled in 25 A.D.) The other twenty-five high priests who spanned 107 years came from families with common priests. Nearly all of them originated in Israel or from the province of Judea. They suddenly formed a new exceedingly influential and powerful hierarchy that emphasized four particular "dynasties" or clans, which fought fiercely for positions in the pontificate. Of the twenty-five illegitimate high priests in office during the reign of Herod and the Romans, no less than twenty-two of them were from these four families. These were the clans of the Boethus with eight high priests to their credit, Annas with eight, Fabus with three and Camithus with the remaining three. The Boethus was the most powerful family, at least in the beginning. Boethus was a native of Alexandria and his son Simon, whose father-in-law was Herod the Great, was his first representative. The extreme strength of this clan gained them the appellation "Boethusians" which is how I heard Lazarus' friends refer to them. After a while, the Annas family attained supremacy. And he held the position for nine years from 6 to 15 A.D. He was subsequently succeeded by his five sons, his son-in-law Caiaphas from 18 to 37 A.D. and his grandson, Matthias in 65 A.D. [Major's note].

After two hours of debate and in view of the limited chance of success, the members of the great Jewish assembly who wanted a trial against Jesus to proceed under the strictest orthodoxy, stood up and presented their resignations. Two weeks later, when the Sanhedrin Council accepted the resignations, they removed five prominent members from the positions based on the accusation of “reflecting sentiments of friendship towards the Nazarene.” These conditions cleared the road for the Sanhedrin who almost unanimously made the decision to apprehend and execute the Teacher.

Lazarus and his family were not mistaken in their belief that Jesus luck was ruined. The hatred of the Sanhedrin for the Rabbi was such that the Temple police received orders to search for and capture Jesus “wherever they found him” on that very same day which was Friday March 10. However the imminent arrival of the Sabbath (at sunset on Friday) saved the Nazarene. Nevertheless, all of Jerusalem knew about Jesus’ presence in Bethany, so the Levites chose to wait until Sunday to render the order for the pursuit and arrest. The teacher’s friends hastened to inform him about the Sanhedrin’s momentous agreement. They pressured him to flee, but Jesus did not heed their warning and remained in the area until Sunday morning on March 12. Subsequent to saying farewell to Lazarus and his sisters, the Rabbi and his group left for their encampment in the city of Pella¹.

Within a few days of the Teacher’s departure, the outwitted Sanhedrin centered their ire on the resurrected man. Lazarus and his family were called to Jerusalem to testify. The high priests insisted that they produce evidence of Jesus’ miraculous act. In this respect, the confirmed testimony of Ben Ahijah, the Temple doctor, who had assisted his neighbor from Bethany during his fulminating illness and Ben Ahijah’s eyewitness account of the embalming ritual, was decisive. Nevertheless on account of Caiaphas’ twisted heart, he and his favorites had the records in the Sanhedrin’s archives read as follows, “This marvel had its source in the evil power of the Prince of Demons, an ally of the Rabbi of Galilee.” The record insisted this resurrection was an act, which was far from opening the souls of the religious representatives in the Hebrew towns; instead it poisoned their feelings toward Jesus even more. The high priests and the Temple leaders managed to convince the rest of the tribunal that if events continued along this route, all of the towns in Israel would end up abiding by the Galilean’s doctrine, which could lead to a national catastrophe. In a certain sense, the Sanhedrin had a valid reason. Many Hebrews—among them a good part of the Sanhedrin’s own followers—already considered the Messiah a political liberator—a revolutionary who would expel the Romans from Israel.

It was precisely at one of these assemblies of the Sanhedrin where, in agreement with my information from Nicodemus, Caiaphas first made an allusion to the ancient Jewish adage, which is repeated, for posterity, specifically “It is more valuable for one man to die, instead of having the entire community perish.”

¹ Although Lazarus, his sisters, and Jesus own group were solicited for a variety of explanations as to which city the Teacher was going to travel to after his friend’s resurrection, all of them converged on Pella. Now this confused me since the evangelical text, John (11:54-55), sets a different location, namely Ephraim—the present day Taiybe in Lebanon—which is situated nineteen kilometers due east of Jerusalem. Strictly speaking, the desert extends from this city to the Jordan River. Today this mountainous region is called *el barriyeh* or the desert. Flavius Josephus cites the city of Pella or Apamea in volume 111 of his book *The Wars of the Jews* as a settlement north of Perea and on the bank of the Jordan River, which was relatively close to Philadelphia (from the east), where Lazarus settled as a refugee when he fled from persecution by the Jews.

But the problems of Israel's supreme assembly did not end with Jesus. The Sanhedrin knew it had a perfect imperative to also eliminate Lazarus.¹ What if they managed to capture and execute the Teacher and Lazarus continued living to the maximum extent of his power? The popularity of the resuscitated man had reached such a degree that both Caiaphas and the Pharisees equally decreed for his destruction.

The Sanhedrin's plan culminated by leaking out and Jesus' friend was promptly informed. This dramatic situation had plunged the family in Bethany into a permanent state of anguish. Now I began to understand their natural suspicion when, only a few hours ago, I had requested an interview with Lazarus...

In my opinion, perhaps another one of the Sanhedrin's serious errors was not detaining the resurrected man in the very beginning. When the high priests confirmed that Jesus had disappeared, they temporarily forgot about Lazarus and gave express orders to Yohanan Ben Gudgeda, the Temple's head porter, as well as the rest of the Levites and the police who served in the Temple, to seized Jesus when he appeared. In the days of preparation prior to the observance of Passover, one of the most widespread comments, which I had the occasion to hear after my arrival in Bethany, was whether the Nazarene had sufficient courage to come to Jerusalem and participate in the sacred rites just as he did every year. This popular gossip unsettled the high priests to the point of moving the "Lazarus problem" to the second level.

As I was reflecting on my first meetings with Jesus' dear friend, I was finally interrupted by Martha's entrance into the living room. She offered me a refreshing repast on a wooden tray; this made me feel grateful again with all of my heart. Owing to the story related by my Hebrew companions, my admiration for the "Lady" had grown appreciably. I supposed that she, with her highly developed sense of intuition, must have noticed this. As Martha delivered the food, she lowered her eyes and blushed.

"Brother Jason," Lazarus announced, "we ask you to willingly accept this humble nourishment. We know you need it. At the same time I would like you to consider this your house. For tonight and whenever you require it, this will be your roof..."

I attempted to dissuade him, but it was useless. Lazarus and his friends had discovered my attitude was truly pure and noble. The day's emotions had undone my appetite and under the complacent gaze of my new friends, I did not tarry in giving a good account of the toasted grain, dried figs, dates, honey and the goat's milk in the earthenware bowl, which formed my supper.

Well into the night, Lazarus himself led me to one of the rooms on the upper level. In it a cot, which is called a "folding bed" had been made with a layer of canvas draped over a woven rope frame. The base of the bed's frame was constructed from two pine wood beams crossed and solidly tied to two feet which formed the shape of an X and were not raised more than forty centimeters from the floor.

For all of the furniture in the tiny rectangular 1.80 x 2.50 meters bedroom including a solid wooden chest of drawers about a meter tall—was made of the same wood which must have been used to construct Noah's legendary Ark. Martha had placed my beautifully cleaned sandals, a wash bowl, a metal pitcher of water, a coarse cloth and a small bouquet of fragrant rosemary with bluish flowers on top the dresser. A simple oil lamp in the shape of a shell illuminated the

¹ To top it off, the name "Lazarus" means, "god has assisted". Many Jews took this as a new sign in Jesus favor [Major's note].

area above the headboard, where the wall was whitewashed, and a short height above the red brick floor.

When the door shut and I found myself alone, I leaned out to the narrow window. My eyes began to fill with tears as I contemplated the legion of stars that were identical to the ones I usually saw above the Mojave Desert. After a long communication with the module, I fell across the bed in exhaustion. Actually, my turbulent exploration had only just begun...

FRIDAY MARCH 31

I was awakened at dawn by a harsh monotonous noise. When I looked out the window to check, I was surprised that the sound seemed to emanate from the entire village. I could not obtain a successful explanation. After quickly washing up, I established contact with the cradle, but even Eliseo could not give me any information about it.

I felt intrigued as I descended the stone stairs, which led to the compound's main courtyard. As I approached the pillars, the volume of the irritating purring sound increased. I noticed the section of the estate where I had stayed for a considerable part of the previous afternoon and I walked to that spot. The fire on the hearth rose vigorously over the fresh logs at the bottom of the fireplace. At the foot of the bonfire's enclosed platform, Martha and one of the servants energetically ground wheat on a stone, which was very similar to the ones I had seen yesterday during my gradual descent of Mount Olivet's northern face. The difference was this grinding stone was black and very highly polished. As I drew near the women and greeted them, I realized the sound came from a basalt stone almost a half a meter long and thirty centimeters wide. Its surface was remarkably worn down by the daily intense grinding of grain. The elders from Lazarus' village told me that if some day the low hum of the wisdom tooth converting wheat into flour stops, then the ruin and desolation that Jeremiah wrote about has arrived in Israel.

I suppose, I was not the first one to be awakened by that noise. Long before sunrise, the women of the house were already toiling over their domestic chores. While Martha was in charge of purchasing the bread at the communal oven, Mary and the other young women hauled water and tidied up the house. The men, for their part, finalized their preparations for doing the hard work in the fields. Lazarus' father was a rich landowner who left his sons enough land to live on without financial difficulties. They could comfortably spare a corner of the field at each harvest for the poor to pick just as the old canons prescribed.¹

I entered the dining room where the intelligent and tireless Martha was preparing flour to make some small cakes without leavening. When she saw me, she stood up and begged me to excuse her brother. Lazarus had to accompany his workers to one of the nearby fields where they went to work on what they call "late sowing" which is the cultivation of crops such as millet, sesame, lentils, melons, etc. that must be planted between January and March.

Before I could react, Martha implored me to sit down at the table. In the blink of an eye she placed a wide wooden bowl in front of me and poured hot milk in it. Ever in silence, while her companion continued grinding the grain, she cut several slices from a loaf of brown bread, which probably weighted more than three pounds. Two generous portions of cheese and honey completed my breakfast.

Since the third hour (which is about nine o'clock in the morning) groups of pilgrims from Galilee or from Perea, wise elders of the family, relatives from Jerusalem and many spectators had been arriving at the gates of Lazarus' house. Almost every day Hebrews had availed themselves of Lazarus' obligatory presence in the Holy City by coming to listen to the resurrected man for entertainment. They also came to see him sitting in the garden. The invasion included the

¹ *Santa Claus* located supporting evidence for this custom in chapters 9, 19, 22, and 23 of the holy text of Leviticus and in chapters 19-21 and 24 of Deuteronomy. A complete treatise on the subject, which comprised eight chapters, was collected in the *Mishnah* [Major's note].

atrium and the main courtyard. It felt like a peculiar rabidity. Could Lazarus have not been aware that the majority of these individuals were merely searching for the source of the gossip?

I understood how Jesus' patient friend preferred to get out of the middle of all of this. When I consulted Martha about which path I should take to get to her brother, the "Lady" gracefully abandoned her chores and even asked me to walk with her through the numerous rows of fruit trees in the spacious orchard behind the house. We had scarcely walked three hundred paces, when I was startled as we squeezed through a small walkway. I stopped. An enormous soft limestone rock rose up in front of me. Some sparrows flickered into crevices where they had constructed mud nests for the first swallows of the season in the stone's surface at the foot of this grayish mass. Swallows prefer circular stones.

Martha comprehended the reason for my surprise and, beckoned me to approach the family tomb. I silently inspected the seal at the mouth of the cave. It consisted of a perfectly carved slab that was barely a meter in diameter and less than thirty centimeters thick. The stone that sealed the entrance was very similar to a millstone. Judging from its dimensions it was too narrow. The surface of the front of the boulder measured from the ground was two meters high by three meters wide. It had been engraved in the style of a façade and plastered in white.

I knew removing the gravestone was considered disrespectful to the dead. So without making any comment, I ignored my impulse to ask Lazarus' sister for permission to move the rock. Nevertheless, it was most likely that if Martha had agreed, neither she alone, nor the both of us together would have been capable of moving the three hundred or five hundred kilogram boulder. Within minutes we left the garden via one of the paths that ran west. I continued following the "Lady" who was taking me to meet her brother.

The temperature at that time of the morning was still a brisk 10°C with a moderate northern wind at 10 knots, which Eliseo confirmed. The previous night, a special oscillometer used a beam of laser light and detected a front of storm clouds (cumulonimbus) three hundred kilometers long that rose six thousand feet above Israel's Phoenician Coast. Suddenly these menacing clouds unrolled vertically and appeared to brake on their way to Jerusalem due to a cold air currents coming from the north.

"But you don't need to discard the report," my partner announced, "the clouds can change the weather conditions and in twenty-four or forty-eight hours, they will drop rain over this area."

I wrapped my *chlamys* around me and pressed on along the tortuous path between the undulating barley fields. Some farm workers had started harvesting. The reapers took the stalks in their right hands and cut the stalks a short distance from its base with their other hand. Their sickles were made of small sheets of curved iron that were securely riveted to a wooden handle. I realized there was a thresher in the area close to the road. Then the grain was separated from the straw either skillfully by hand or with the help of the oxen. In the latter case, which I verified to be the most frequently employed, the animals tread on the barley and the men pass a thresher that is drawn by the same oxen over the ground. The most common thresher is constructed from a flat plank whose inner surface was incrustated with small chunks of flint. Other models were simply made of wooden rollers. In a second operation, the women discarded the straw by sifting through the grain and putting it in sacks. Several donkeys and a assortment of carts transported the bags into the village where they were transferred into silos or huge earthenware vats like the one I had seen in Lazarus' house.

It wasn't long before I encountered the resurrected man and his workers. Lazarus was happy to see me; he flatly refused my offer to help the laborers with the sowing. We found ourselves in a full dialectical struggle when one of the attendants called for our attention. There was a rider coming from the village.

Lazarus held his left hand above his eyes like a visor and looked intensely into the distance. All at once, without making the smallest comment, he dropped the seed bag his employee had been holding and set off on the road toward the trail. The rider rode up to Lazarus at a trot, dismounted and embraced him. An instant later he returned to his mount and left heading towards Bethany. The resurrected man made a sign for me to come closer. As I drew closer to him, his face appeared to be glowing.

"The Teacher has come!" he blurted out point blank with an uncontainable joy. "Eventually you will be able to meet him. We are going now. I have a lot to do."

"But where is he? Has he already arrived?" I began asking in a rush while I tried to follow him. But Lazarus did not respond.

Before I could react he had the advantage of fifty meters on me. In spite of his apparent debility, he ran like a wildcat. As I entered the house, I understood the news had altered both family and friends. Martha, more than anyone else, ran from one side to the other, nervous and smiling. When she saw us, she hugged Lazarus and confirmed the good news again.

"He's coming! Jesus is coming!"

Her brother attempted to calm her by asking her about some details.

"They say it is about ten stadia to Bethany," the Lady added.

I performed a rapid mental calculation. This meant the Rabbi had travelled approximately 1,860 kilometers from the village. I could have sworn that despite all of my intense preparation, the long years of mental training and my situation as a skeptic, Lazarus' family had managed to infect me with nervousness. I was unable to avoid the chills which shook my spine. My throat had inexplicably become dry. Nonetheless, in an effort to calm down, I attributed it all to that crazy run from the field. (Once again I was mistaken...)

Following Lazarus' advice, I stayed inside the house. My first intention was to leave in search of the Nazarene, but the resurrected man suggested it would be much better if I waited for him at the house.

"He always comes to our hearth. Besides," he insinuated, "the new has already arrived in Jerusalem and soon one will not be able to walk through the streets of Bethany."

"Then," I remarked with concern, "the Teacher has accepted the challenge and will spend Passover in the Holy City."

My friend did not wish to reply. However, I sense a heavy veil of sorrow in his gaze. Their presentiment was this would be Jesus of Nazareth's last Passover. No one had to say the high priest and his henchmen would already be informed of the presence of the imposter in the neighboring village. And this, as I knew very well from Lazarus and his sisters, was dangerous.

At a little after the ninth hour—perhaps it was four o'clock or four thirty in the afternoon, all of a sudden the level of agitation in the crowd of people on the estate's gated courtyard shot up. Martha and Mary hurried to the atrium and disappeared among the groups of men and women who practically stopped up the main entrance.

My heart raced. I heard the murmur of shouts and greetings outside. Without knowing why, I felt frightened. I took a few steps back and hid behind one of the columns to the right of the courtyard. The palms of my hands had begun to sweat. I pretended to press my ear and in a low voice I informed Eliseo of Jesus' imminent arrival. In a matter of minutes, Lazarus' servants, friends and family were parting a large group of men who had erupted into the yard.

Between the laughter, kisses and multicolored mantles, my eyes quickly fixed on an individual who stood above the rest. That had to be Jesus!

His height, which I calculated at the first moment I saw him—was more than 1.8 meters. This set him aside from almost all of those assembled as a giant. He was dressed in a "burgundy" colored mantle which wrapped around his throat and rolled up at the ends around his neck and fell loosely over his wide and powerful shoulders. A long white tunic with wide sleeves covered him almost to his ankles. I did not see a sash or any belt. He wore a white linen coil over his forehead which fell over the right side of his hair.

Not even at the instant of mass inversion on the module the night of January 30, 1973 did I experience a cardiac acceleration like the one I endured during those moments.

The giant walked slowly to the center of the courtyard. His right arm rested on Lazarus' shoulder. Mary and Martha gesticulated around him and clapped their hands while making him laugh in general.

Without a doubt, he was a white man. His long narrow face was from one of the Caucasian towns. His straight, light caramel-colored hair fell over his shoulders. But after he undid the band of cloth which was rolled up over his forehead and which he and nearly all of the men in the group wore, I could see that he parted his hair in the middle. He had a mustache and a fine beard that was the color of old gold—similar to a horse's mane and parted in half. Although his mustache was pronounced, it was relatively fine and did not hide his face. His nose confused me. It was long, thin, and prominent.

After Jesus entered the house, he did not stop smiling and displaying his white impeccable teeth, which were very different from the ones most of the Hebrews endured.

The Teacher was sitting at the edge of the central pool on one of the stools that had been retrieved from the "dining room". Men, women and children milled around him. The rays of sunshine shone on his face and I marveled. The contrast with the hardened sown wrinkles of his aged friend and his followers was simply admirable. His skin looked tanned and bronzed.

I was timidly leaning out from behind the pilaster. Jesus was a little more than four or five meters away, he raised his face towards me and pierced me with his gaze. A type of fire coursed through my belly. To everyone's surprise the Rabbi stood up. A passage opened among the people who had started sitting on the red brink paving. My knees began to shake. But escape was not possible. The giant was in front of me. I will never forget his look. The Galilean's slightly almond shaped eyes were the vivid color of honey. They had a singular ability: they seemed to concentrate all of the strength of the cosmos. They did more than observe—they

transfixed. His long thick eyelashes gave him a special attractiveness. His clear forehead ended with straight and sufficiently separated eyebrows. I did not blink. The sun coolly illuminated his peaceful face and infused him with a strange aspect.

He raised his arms and placed his large hairy hand on my shoulders as he smiled and then winked at me. An unexpected color inundated me from head to foot. I tried to respond to his gesture, but I could not. I was dazed, confused and emotional.

“Welcome.”

The words he spoke in Greek ended up disarming me. There was such a security and affection in his voice that I needed more time to react.

The Rabbi returned to his spot next to the cistern, while his friends pondered in total silence. Finally some of his disciples broke the silence by asking the resuscitated man who I was. Lazarus took an undeniable satisfaction in explaining I was an invited guest a 'foreigner, who had arrived from Tyre expressly to meet Jesus'.

I remained motionless—as if I was petrified—as I attempted to order my thoughts. It cannot be, I repeated to myself over and over. It is impossible that he would guess it. How can it be?

Although I returned to what he said many times, I always arrived at the same crossroad. If no one had spoken to me, why were they going to? How could they know who I was and why I was there? There were fifty people in the courtyard. He knew many of them—that much was obvious—but not others. This was my situation and yet he had walked up to me....

Never, not even now as I write these recollections could I be certain. But only a being with special powers could have acted that way.

But that was not how it was; I had simply been "recognized" as a consequence of our "future" and prolonged "adventure". A third "jump" in time, which we were not thinking about then. Who knows?

Why am I going to lie? For me the rest of the afternoon was like lightning that tears through the sky from east to west. I barely noticed anything. I know Martha washed the Nazarene's feet and rubbed them with myrrh just like she did with me. I vaguely remember—between the constant greetings—how Jesus left the house with Lazarus and a large group. Later Martha informed me that all of the rooms in the estate were fully occupied by their friends and relatives who had come from Bethany. It had been agreed with Simon who was the Teacher's unconditionally respected elder and a longstanding friend of the family, that Jesus would stay overnight in the house of this leper.

In the beginning many of the residents of Bethany and pilgrims who travelled to the village debated the belief that the Rabbi would enter Jerusalem on Friday afternoon in defiance of the decree for his arrest, which had been promulgated by the Sanhedrin. But they were wrong. Jesus and his people arranged to spend the night in Simon's house as well as the homes of other friends and family. Truly, everyone made it possible for the Teacher to be happy during his stay in the small town.

According to Martha, Simon had wanted to convince Jesus to be the guest of honor and had announced a grand banquet, which would occur the day after Saturday. This meant a new hustle and bustle of activity in both houses, since in agreement with the strict rudiments of Jewish law; the Hebrew's holy day began precisely at dusk on the previous day.

For the rest of the journey, the Teacher from Galilee received an infinite number of friends and visitors and conversed with them all. Before nightfall, Jesus returned to Lazarus' house. There, in the company of his intimate friends and the resurrected man's family, Jesus regained his strength and displayed an excellent mood.

Lazarus asked me to join them. The men took seats around the large rectangular table in the "dining room" while the women who were directed by Martha, began to serve. At first I maintained my prudent love of the fireplace. But Lazarus insisted and I was obliged to share an abundance of food with them. This included some food from the hunt, pulses, dried fruit, and wine. I was surprised to realize that none of the food was taken with water. Wine usually substituted for water.

Before they started the late "supper" the Teacher and fourteen or fifteen people stood up and sang a brief canticle. I wanted to do the same, but it was more logical for me to stay quiet. When the dinner was finished, Martha in one of her constant comings and goings--explained to me that this hymn called "Listen Israel" was actually an oration. I was surprised to see how the Rabbi respected his town's old traditions, despite public accusations of his differences by the doctors of law. I do not know if I mentioned that the Teacher had put on a show throughout the afternoon with a contagious sense of humor. He was laughing and making jokes about everything. That was how it was, at least in the days proceeding April 6. It was yet another aspect of his amazing character. How far he was from the grave, tormented image one infers from many of the books written in the twentieth century! Jesus of Nazareth was a mixture of a boy and a general. He was an ingenuous pastor and a conscientious analyst; a man who lived each day and was a prudent counselor. But above all, I noted he was happy. He was much more joyous and carefree than his own friends and disciples who were visibly altered by the high priests' threats.

Immediately afterwards, Jesus presided over the large table next to Lazarus-- he took this position beside one of people carrying the bread; following his custom, he broke the bread and then distributed it to the guests. We had scarcely begun to eat when the Teacher suddenly addressed one of the men in the group. When he called him by his name, my heart jumped. It was Judas Iscariot.

The disciple stood up, walked slowly over to the Rabbi and gave him something. Then he returned to his place. It was like I was hypnotized as I contemplated a slender, lank man who was more than 170 meters tall. His aquiline nose emphasized a pale almost emaciated face, which I had studied in Earnest Kretschmer's classification of typology.

(This great psychiatrist would have been satisfied to know that in this case his definition of the "leptosomic type" completely coincided with Judas' "schizothymic" temperament, which was serious, introverted, reserved, unsociable and malicious. The truth is this conformed to the man's known character. My perception was that it was a case of an extremely shy man who did not have the opportunity to develop his immense wealth of affection.

His abundant fine black hair contrasted with his practically hairless face. As he approached Jesus, I noted that his tunic was fastened at the waist with a dark cummerbund or a *hagorah* instead of a simple cord or clasp. He extracted a small leather bag from inside of it.

From what I could verify, evidently the main use of a cummerbund was to hold money and small objects, including weapons. Judas carried a small sword on his right side. However, at that time I did not appreciate the fact that the other disciples might also carry swords under their mantles and *hagorahs* just like Judas did.

The Rabbi asked Lazarus' sisters to come closer to him. Mary was the first to abandon the equipment she was operating at the stove and settle down at one of the corners of the table near the Galilean. Soon Martha entered the room as she dried her hands on her apron. The light from the two hefty lamps or portable chandeliers on the table revealed Mary's attractive profile. Her thick mane of black hair had been carefully brushed back so that it fell down her back almost to her waist. A sky blue headband fastened Mary's hair over her forehead and stood out on her olive colored skin. She had small, delicate features. It is all a miracle for a woman to be thirty years old in this hard society. My attempts to talk to her had not been successful even once. Nevertheless, her fathomless black eyes revealed a particularly sensible heart.

Jesus placed a small bag in Mary's hands and addressing Martha and Mary, asked them to accept the little present. While Mary blushed, Martha, who was seized with curiosity, snatched the gift out of her sister's hands and promptly opened it. From my seat, I could barely see enough to distinguish granules. Then I knew the Rabbi had purchased balsam seeds when he had traveled through Jericho. Before the general rejoicing, Mary quietly approached Jesus and planted two loud kisses on his cheeks.

However the dinner's happy and confident atmosphere gradually decayed thanks to some of Christ's men. It was obvious they were seriously preoccupied with the direction of the Teacher's next steps. They completely ignored the fact that there was no place for them to be doubtful. They brought up the point about the high priest's order for Jesus' capture without delay and the necessary steps they must adopt in order to safeguard, primarily, the Rabbi's security and, at the same time, that of the rest of the group.

One of the most radical and ardent disciples was the one with a graying beard and a shaved mustache who was practically bald and had bright eyes. His round head emphasized his thick neck. This man had a face lined with wrinkles. I wrongly estimated he was much older (perhaps around forty or fifty years old)—was not a supporter of Jesus entering Jerusalem¹

¹ Simon Peter matched the "pyknic" type described by Kretschmer as one with a round, soft, wide face. The view of his face from the front reminded one of a shield. His forehead was wide and some of his hair was left near his temples.

However Peter did not exhibit excessive obesity. His thoracic cavity as well as his shoulders were strong and muscular which was very proper for a life dedicated to rough fishing work.

It was a coincidence that Kretschmer's classification for Peter's personality was the "cyclothymic" type, which is an open, spontaneous, person who is quickly friendly, and whose moods undergo large oscillations. Since he had a great capacity for tuning in to emotions, it was easy for him to convey joy or sadness. And I had ample opportunities to confirm this. In summary, Peter was very sociable and well accepted by the rest of the group [Major's note].

. It was logical for them to fear for the Rabbi's life, so they attempted to form a determined and dangerous group.

Jesus was a serious and impassive attendee at every discussion. He allowed them to talk to each other without pronouncing a word until the decisive moment in the controversy, and then the Teacher permitted us to hear his deep voice. As he spoke to the blue-eyed apostle, he delivered a judgment.

"Peter, have you still not comprehended that no prophet is accepted in his own town and that no doctor cures the people whom they know?"

After he fixed his hawk eyes on mine, he added, "If the flesh had been made the cause of the spirit, it would be a marvel. If the spirit had been made the cause of the body, it would be a miracle of miracles. A greater marvel to me is, how has vast wealth been kept in poverty?"

A dense silence floated over the large room. And the Teacher stood up and withdrew to rest.

For that and the following night, the disciples, who were frightened of everyone and everything—mounted a guard where pairs of them were stationed at the doors to Simon "the leper's" house. Judas Iscariot, Simon, as well as Peter and his brother Andrew who were called the "Zealots" and the awesome twins Judas and James, were armed with short swords that were virtually identical to the ones the gladiators from the Roman legion carried. These were known as the Polybius or the Spanish sword. The weapon was sixty to seventy centimeters long with a wide double blade and a fearsome point.

Jesus' disciples endeavored to conceal them under their mantles—generally on the right hand side—and inside a wooden sheath.

Jesus was not ignorant of the fact that some of his closest followers were carrying weapons. However, except for the sad moment when he was captured on Thursday in the garden at Gethsemane, he never mentioned it nor reproached anyone.

I should not hide it. Before retiring, some of the disciples whispered amongst themselves and exchanged intense looks. Finally, John of Zebedee decided the rest would advance towards the one who read and wrote in the name of the group.

"My friend Jason, it is odd. We all experience an identical sensation. We all believe we know you. For several years, another Greek—whose name was also Jason—followed the Teacher's steps and lived with all of us. He left just a few days ago and said good-bye forever...but we understand it was only a coincidence."

"Why?" I interrupted, intrigued by this second curious coincidence.

"That Jason," he responded with affection, "was almost elderly. You, in contrast, are young."

I could not logically comprehend the extent of this revelation. Not then....

SATURDAY APRIL 1

In a marked difference from the rest of the trip, at dawn on Saturday I was not awakened by the murmuring noise of grinding grain. It seemed as if the entire village was sleeping: it was eerily silent. Starting from sunset on Friday, which is called the Sabbath vigil, the Hebrews' masters, servants and even pack animals were practically paralyzed. The Law prohibited all major work, large displacements, lovemaking, carrying water from wells and starting a fire. These overwhelming rules, which originated in the religion, completely overturned the daily rhythm of Jewish social life. Although the main motive must have been to emphasize joy and the merits of rest, it had ended by being deformed until it transformed into a tangled code of regulations, which were mostly ridiculed and considered absurd.

Following Jesus' example, Lazarus and his family adopted a much more liberal attitude. That afternoon I had the opportunity to observe the many annoyances and headaches, which were dragged out as a consequence of the sincere implementation of, the practices of the doctrines preached by the Rabbi of Galilee. In spite of everything, I was frankly surprised to see, from the first hours of the morning—an endless crowd that proceeded from Jerusalem and the campgrounds set up next to the city walls and sought to greet Lazarus and the man who had been capable of defying the Great Sanhedrin. According to my information, one of the precepts on the Sabbath specified that the man of the house must give three orders at dusk on Friday evening: 'Have we set aside the tenth?'¹, 'Have we prepared the *erub*?' Finally, the head of the household must order the lighting of the lamp.

Well then, if the distance from Jerusalem to Bethany was about fifteen stadia (nearly three kilometers), how was it that these Jews broke one of the strictest rules of the Sabbath: walking more than the two thousand cubits set by the Law²? Lazarus materialized with a playful smile to explain to me how, also in those days, the one who "set the law, set a trap..."

In order to lighten the two thousand cubits regulation, the Israelites had "invented" the *erub*. For example, if on the eve of the Sabbath (Friday), a person placed food for two meals inside a radius of two thousand cubits or one thousand meters, this *erub* was considered a "temporary residence" and the person could walk another two thousand cubits or one thousand meters in any direction.³

This explained the massive presence of pilgrims and residents of Jerusalem in Bethany. According to my friend, they could have stationed one or two *erub* in the path that connects the

¹ The strict laws of rest for the Sabbath went to the extreme of dictating which food was to be consumed. This had to be a tenth and separated before Saturday. On the Sabbath one could not perform such a task [Major's note].

² There was a difference between the Roman cubit of 74 millimeters, which is the length of one hand, and the Jewish cubit, which is also called the Philetaerus foot (and measured 52.5 centimeters) after the King of Pergamum, Philetaerus who was in power in the eastern Roman Empire from the establishment of the Asian province in the year 133 B.C. This unit of measurement was commonly used in Palestine and Egypt. In a routine contact with the module, the main computer confirmed that after Didymus of Alexandria (at the end of the first century of our era), the Egyptian cubit of the Roman era was equivalent to one and a half feet in the Ptolemaic system. That is 525 millimeters. The writings of Josephus Flavius also present this unit of measurement as it was described in the rabbinical literature [Major's note].

³ The same technique was used by several neighbors who set food in a patio under the assumption that this was considered to be a single house. In this way, it was permissible for them to transport objects within the interior [Major's note].

three communities: Jerusalem, Bethpage and the village where I found myself now. At last my situation as a foreigner and a gentile provided me with an opportunity to help the family who had welcomed me under their roof. Until the third hour (9 am) and after overcoming Martha's resistance, I occupied myself with transporting water as well as food from the fire in the chimney. I gathered eggs from the chicken coop, cleaned and prepared an ingenious device they called an *antiki* which was nothing other than a type of metallic water heater with a receptacle for the embers. The Sabbath rest prohibited the removal of the ashes and, in the same way; I suppose to return and to reload them. This contraption put an interior tube in contact with the fire and was very useful for heating water. Since I was not a Jew, I was free from their rules and this, as I said, allowed me to partly repay my friends for their graciousness and hospitality.

But my heart burned with the desire to leave in order to find Jesus. Martha, with her refined sense of intuition, suggested I leave everything and go search for the Teacher. A little earlier, during one of her visits to her neighbor, Simon's house, with the intent of preparing the feast that the residents of Bethpage and Bethany were holding for the Rabbi, she had happened to see Jesus in the garden.

When I was ready to leave the house, the "Lady" reminded me that I had also been invited to the banquet and if I wished, she would lead me to the place where I had been assigned. I knew very well this dinner was going to produce a "special" event. But at the time I could not imagine the grave repercussions that would involve the Teacher...

Ever since the death of Lazarus' father, Simon was the richest and most important man in Bethany. His estate was a short distance away in the center of the eastern part of the town. The only substantial difference between his house and that of my friend was the luxuriant garden studded with cypresses, carob trees and palms, which were all perfectly enclosed by a stone wall two meters high. In Jerusalem any gardens other than rose gardens were illegal. However, this rule did not apply to the rest of the towns. Simon was a fervent believer and follower of Christ as well as a plant lover. He spent a good part of his retirement among his roses, galbanum, the white luminous perfumed storax flowers and the curious tragacanth in whose branches and trunks flowed a prized off-white, highly medicinal gum.

A silent throng amassed at the gates to the estate where they waited to see the Teacher. As if it were a matter of a twentieth century politician, several of Jesus' disciples remained posted next to the front door with their backs hidden by the wide sash and the cloak. They controlled the entrances and exits of friends, relatives and servants into the house: only those authorized were admitted past the threshold.

I did not have the least problem walking past the men of Galilee. My friendship with Lazarus and Jesus' opportune gesture when he greeted me late yesterday caused me to win the apostles' sympathy and confidence. When they saw me, one of the disciples—Judas' twin the other Alpheus—asked me if I was looking for someone in particular. I told him Jesus and he volunteered that he was delighted to accompany me. As I passed through the main door, I found myself at the front of an extensive impeccable garden. A narrow path adorned with white stones (limestones, no doubt) led us in a straight line to the open esplanade at the foot of the same marble staircase to the house.

It was unnecessary for Judas to point out the Teacher to me. I found the giant surrounded by twelve children—playing. This scene fascinated me to such an extent that I silently almost tiptoed around the small esplanade and sat on the first steps of the staircase. And there I stayed, absorbed and enjoying it as much as the little ones.

Jesus had taken off his cloak. His splendid white tunic was tied at the waist with a cord. Between the children's jubilation his laughter stood out clean and emphatic as a brilliant morning. The truth is I was most impressed by this man when I verified how wise he was. The man who was capable of defying the supreme high priests or reviving the dead—jumped, ran or fell on the ground as he completely surrendered to the exigencies of these little people. Some women covertly peeked out from the courtyard, pondered the assembled scene and then escaped as they barely contained their mocking laughter.

One of their games was especially odd. The Galilean turned his back to the group of children and threw a stick behind him so that it fell as far as possible from the youngsters. The kids fought for possession of the stick until one of them, generally the highest jumper, returned it to Jesus. At that instant, Jesus as well as the rest of the children, ran in all directions. The "owner" of the "baton" strained to chase and touch any one of the other players with the stick. It was not a coincidence that all of the children tried to "catch" the Rabbi. But he was far from giving in easily. He ran like crazy, dodging and avoiding the trees and bushes.

I do not know how long this lasted. Perhaps it was one or two hours. I was suddenly struck by a presentiment. Either I was very mistaken or these were going to be the last games for Jesus of Nazareth.

Soon, when the inexplicable melancholy was most poignant, the Teacher stopped the game. He removed the cloth blindfold from his eyes and retired from the game of "little blind hen". He caressed the children as he let them know the fun was over.

Although Jesus had multiple opportunities to see me seated there, it was at this moment that he looked directly at me. The children scattered through the garden and the Teacher advanced toward the staircase. I tried to stand up, but the Rabbi extended his hand and indicated for me not to move. He sat next to me. His breathing was still agitated and his forehead was dripping with sweat.

"Jason, my friend. What is happening?"

This revelation plunged me into confusion again. Without even looking at me or waiting for a reply (What type of reply could I have given?), he continued in a tone of complicity that I instantly noticed.

"You are here to obtain proof and you must not get weak."

"Then you know who I am..."

Jesus smiled and put his long arm across my shoulders and gestured towards the door of the garden where his disciples still stood guard.

"A lot of time will pass before these and future generations comprehend who I am and why my father sent me. In spite of having arrived from wherever you came from, you are much closer to the truth than they are."

"Teacher, I don't understand why your men are armed. Very few would believe it ...in my time."

me.”

“Those who are with me,” He responded with a timbre of sadness, “do not understand

“There are so many things I want to discuss with you, Lord!”

“We still have time. It is enough that we lead each day with eagerness.”

It was annoying, I had spent so much time waiting for this opportunity and now when I was hand-to-hand with him, I did not know what to say or what to ask.

“Before you asked me about what happened to me,” I said intrigued, “How did you find out?”

“Pick up a rock and you will find me there. Cut wood and I am there. Where there is loneliness, I am there too.”

“You know, all of my life I have felt alone.”

Jesus retorted explosively, “I am the light which is above everyone. There are many who are together at the door, but truly I say to you, only those who are lonely will enter into the nuptial chamber.”

“It reassures me to know we who doubt have a corner in our heart.”

The giant smiled for the second time. But this time his eyes shone like polished bronze.

“The world is not worthy of one who can find himself.”

“I have asked the same question a thousand times: Why are you here?”

“The world is a bridge. It is a passage through him but not settled in him.”

“But,” I insisted, “You haven’t answered my question...”

“Yes, Jason. Yes I have. This world is like an anteroom to my father’s kingdom. You prepare in the anteroom and finally you are admitted to the banquet hall. I know the path for you to take so you won’t be stopped!”

“But, Lord, I know many who are “set” on your wisdom and they say they possess the truth...”

“Tell me one thing Jason. Where does the seed grow?”

“In the ground.”

“In truth I tell you, genuine wisdom can only be born in the heart which has become like dust. The wise and the elderly who do not hesitate to ask a child, who is seven days old about the source of life, will live. Because many of the first will be last and they will be one.”

“You speak the truth, but where must we search for it?”

"If they say it is in the sea, then the fish in the sea will have precedence. But I declare to you that my father's kingdom is inside and outside of you. When you know, you will be known and they will know you as sons of the living father. But even more so, if not, you will be in poverty and you will be the poor."

The Rabbi must have noted my confusion. He added, "Have you heard your own heart sometime?"

I agreed without knowing where he was going to stop.

"The secret for possessing the truth is only with my father. And in truth I say to you, my father is always in your heart. You only have to look 'inside'...Blessed is the one who searches and still dies believing one will never find it. And happy is the one who in the effort of searching finds. When one finds, one will be disturbed. And having been disturbed, one will marvel and reign over everything."

"Lord, I look at my surroundings and I marvel and I am saddened at the same time..."

"I assure you Jason, everyone who knows what he has before his eyes will receive the revelation of what is hidden. There is no secret which will not be revealed."

My initial timidity had vanished. This man's warmth and cordiality finally smashed through the most impregnable walls. But our conversation was unexpectedly interrupted by several of the disciples. The crowd was piling up at the doors to Simon's house and demanding to see the Rabbi. Yet the Nazarene's men felt helpless about containing them.

When the Teacher went away, I swore to search for new opportunities to converse with him and expose my endless doubts. I followed him. The crowd I had seen at the gates of the garden in front of Simon's house exploded when they saw the Teacher. But Jesus did not move away from the portal. He stood there flanked by his disciples and greeted the pilgrims. However, those who were knowledgeable of the miracles that had been performed on Lazarus were not content only to see him and began to ask for a sign. I could not get over my astonishment. Judging from their shouts, these Hebrews, the majority of them were Galileans—did not come to listen to the Nazarene. Instead the only thing that was important to them was witnessing another miracle....

With evident disappointment, Jesus raised his arms and silence descended—an expectant silence. Then many of the people who were gathered there began to sit on the ground, convinced that their long walk was not in vain and they would soon observe another "spectacle". But the Teacher spoke to them in an emphatic tone.

"Fools! I appear in the middle of the world and am seen in the flesh by them. And I discover all men are drunk and I find no one among them is thirsty... My spirit is hurt by the children of men since their hearts are blind and they do not see."

And before anyone present could react by making even a half turn, they had lost him as he quickly passed in the direction of the host's mansion. I was honestly happy. This turbulent, thirsty emotion for miracles did not deserve anything else. I was gradually learning the reasons why the multitude had scarcely assimilated this man's message. Just as I would see the next day, not even those who were closest to him on the occasion of his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem—had distinguished the ministry of Christ from the "kingdom" that the Teacher referred

to. I began to comprehend the true reach of one of the Rabbi's phrases which he delivered a short time before on the stairs: "Those who are with me have not learned from me..."

About three o'clock in the afternoon, in the company of Lazarus and his sisters, I entered the gated courtyard at Simon's house for the first time. The elderly man was receiving guests in the center of a room for fifty diners. Everyone, both known and unknown, was greeted by the head of the household with an osculation or a kiss of peace. Immediately the respected leper's relatives or servants escorted the invitees to their assigned places around a very low table in the shape of a U. In contrast to the courtyard in Lazarus' house, the one in Simon's house was entirely covered by a canopy or canvas that was attached by a rope to the capitals of the columns, which surrounded that beautiful place. Boards covered the main cistern so that a u-shape was formed in the center and there was more than enough space for the servants to move.

When I arrived before of Simon, Lazarus took charge of introducing me to the elder. The moment I kissed him, I noticed how his right cheek still bore heavy scar tissue from his illness. Part of his eye as well as a section of his top lip was practically torn and deformed. His full white beard did not hide the signs of the terrible affliction. His left hand had remained mutilated: the last phalanges of three fingers were gone.

Nevertheless, the venerated elder seemed to have forgotten those difficult years. Now he appeared happy and satisfied as he shone in his best clothes. He wore a purple linen tunic, and a brilliant red and blue striped silk cloak. As Lazarus and I arrived at our respective places, I was relieved to realize the resuscitated man had been assigned to sit next to me. Instinctively, I looked over at Martha, who stood beside the rest of the women. She smiled mischievously.

Following the current custom, I reclined on my right side.¹ Although the Jews usually dined while seated in chairs or, on grand occasions, on stools, in this feast in which both of the villages Bethany and Bethpage rendered a sincere homage to the Teacher, the Hebrews had adopted the Hellenistic tradition of lunching while reclining on comfortable cushions and mats. In this case, the only exception was Jesus: the guest of honor occupied the center of the "U" which had been prepared with a special low divan, which barely cleared the table.

Although all of the guests had received an invitation with their names and the names of the rest of the invitees, on Friday morning, in accordance with the tradition, the owner of the house also sent messengers to his friends' homes on Saturday morning to remind them of the time and place of the banquet. Respectful forgetfulness was included in the great friendship, which united both families for Lazarus had waited until the messenger delivered the second communication. Only at that moment did he leave his house.

While I climbed the stairs to Simon's estate, a white cloth attached to the doors of the atrium caught my attention. Lazarus explained to me that the purpose of this piece of fabric was to communicate there was time to enter the dinner. This "alert" was only removed after the third plate had been served.

Jesus and his disciples—all twelve of them—were already in the courtyard when the host received my friend and me. As far as I could tell, the Rabbi seemed to have forgotten the disagreeable incident with the multitude that had demanded a miracle. He was openly laughing and displaying an enviable sense of humor. His men, in contrast did not reflect very much joy in spite of having set aside their swords. I noted their nervousness and austerity. In a second I

¹ The Israelites were more dexterous with their left hands rather than their right ones.

understood the reason why. Among the quests I discovered four or five priests from one of the communities of Pharisees. They were the Teacher's mortal enemies. Several Temple police remained at the door. The majority of them were Levites who had come as far as Bethany with the suspicious mission of escorting high level dignitaries from Jerusalem's priesthood. In a low voice Lazarus made a comment to me that there was a peculiar uncertainty about the authenticity of the propositions made by these Pharisees. It was very possible they were men from the Sanhedrin who were following Caiaphas' orders and intending to apprehend Jesus at sundown at the end of the Sabbath. But the "separate" or "holy" as the Pharisees were also called did not make a move to do anything, which could have alerted Christ's followers. Quite the opposite: at no moment did they approach the group that was holding a discussion with Jesus. After pulling up the wide sleeves of their tunics, they allowed the women to proceed with the mandatory washing of hands and feet, and reclined in their places with lively demonstrations of satisfaction. I suppose their amiability could have been in response to the magnificent viands, which had begun to circulate around the table. Simon's servants had prepared a type of fine ceramic bowl (which today is known as *terra sigillata*). They were dense, well formed and made from red clay, which originated in Italy—as Lazarus pointed out to me. I lifted the bowl so I could see the manufacturer's stamp on the bottom. It was a certain potter from Arezzo. (I memorized the name and when I last returned to the module at on Monday afternoon, Santa Claus confirmed the cited Italian artisan had lived and worked during the time of Tiberius and Claudius namely from 12 to 54 AD.

Simon followed the custom of hiring a cook from Jerusalem. Curiously, if things went badly and the guests expressed disgust with the menu, then the head of the kitchen must make amends for the affront by paying for the cost out of his own pocket; in a proportion, which always depended on the social class of the hosts and the dinner guests.

This was not the case. The truth is, everything they made was exquisite. (At least for the Hebrews.) After a clear soup with a vegetable and aromatic herb stock, this was the only dish that we used a spoon for, the guests enjoyed bronze and silver trays laden with fish stew and roasted lamb seasoned with the customary base of onions, garlic, and leeks. The fourth or "fifth" course consisted of dried fruit, especially raisins, dates and wild honey. Of course all of these were generously sprinkled—from start to finish with a wine from the Hebron, which was also served in tall, delicate, cut crystal glasses. A metal pitcher and basin had been set on the side of each diner for washing their hands. (The Judaic custom decrees that food must be eaten with one's fingers.)

When the desserts arrived, the general level of gaiety increased appreciably. Some of the servants and musicians contracted by Simon began to play their instruments; these were mostly flutes and zithers. And the women, who had either remained standing or seated in a separate group which had waited on the dinner guests, joined the music by waving their palms above their heads and following the rhythm with their bodies.

Jesus—who had eaten with a healthy appetite—drained his third glass of wine and smiled at the group where Mary stood out. Just like the rest of her companions, Lazarus' younger sister had transformed her everyday clothes by wearing a tunic. Hers was brightly dyed with the famous purple from Tyre and Sidon. (Our information indicated that the famous mollusks from the Phoenician beaches—the murex—were the primary source of the purple dye. The ink, which turned dark red when it was exposed to the air, was extracted from this gastropod. The Phoenicians discovered it and knew how to commercialize it.)

In accordance with the rules for the Sabbath, Mary had dispensed with the customary ribbon over her forehead and allowed her long black hair to float.

The moment the servants put away the trays, what we call the "after dinner conversation" truly began. The dinner guests, who were euphoric from the wine vapors, became involved in the most disparate and interminable polemics. At the head of the table, Jesus and Simon discussed the mythical Joshua and how they knocked down the walls of Jericho. For their part, the disciples remained strangely sober and silent as they watched the only group of Pharisees who did not stop draining glass after glass of wine.

To my surprise, several of the guests began to belch without the least amount of compunction. This soon evolved into something collective. With the exception of the host, and me no one seemed to give excessive importance to the act. But Simon-- who acknowledged each one of these rude gestures with a slight nod of his head—had values that obeyed a different scale. These belches were a public demonstration of each one of the guest's satisfactions with the splendid food and hospitality they had received. I supposed I had to force myself to belch "gratefully" for my new friend's connoisseurship of gastronomies and delicacies.

Once they finished serving the desserts, several maids passed next to every diner and offered them tiny transparent whitish-yellow marbles or capsules. Faced with my hesitation, Lazarus encouraged me to take one or two of the "tears" and put them into my mouth. They were a type of refreshing and aromatic chewing gum. According to my friend, it was isolated from mastic trees, which grew by the thousands all over Palestine. For the Hebrews, these marbles strengthened their teeth and throat in addition to providing very fresh and agreeable breath. Thanks to the "tears" Lazarus gave me, my lack of dental hygiene was noticeably alleviated in the subsequent days.

Regardless of how everything seemed to transpire in the most intense and wholesome joy, it was not going to delay the explosive "scandal"...

I believe all or nearly all of those present were so distracted by the music and the pleasant gathering that we delayed in noticing a woman had discreetly left the circle of women and was kneeling behind Jesus. It was Mary.

An internal lash warned me. I was on the point of witnessing the scene of an anointing. Without being able to help it, I stood up before a bewildered Lazarus and slipped behind the table so I was at one of the corners of the "U" a few meters from the guest of honor.

The guests were gradually falling silent, aghast at what was happening before them. With her customary muteness, the younger sister opened a "bottle" about thirty centimeters tall with a tapering shape. It appeared to be made from an extremely translucent material (afterwards I knew it was oriental alabaster).

And in front of Jesus' complacent gaze, the woman poured a good part of its contents over the Teacher's hair. A liquid the color of cognac slowly and sweetly soaked into the Rabbi's hazel hair while a penetrating fragrance filled the room. Mary closed the bottle, placed it between her legs and proceeded to spread the perfume over the Galilean's silky hair. This unction was performed with such simplicity and love that the giant's eyes filled with tears.

Mary concluded the operation by opening the container again and emptying the essence of tuberose over the Teacher's naked feet. Little by little she rubbed the liquid over his ankles,

heels and toes, giving Jesus a prolonged, smooth massage until the liquid was perfectly distributed.¹

At the culmination of the unction, some of the guests had begun to murmur about it; they complained it was wasteful. Several disciples at one of the far ends of the table, most notably Judas Iscariot who stood out with his dramatic gesturing and the rising tone of his words, joined his comrades and the rest of the guests in openly displaying disgust at the woman's gesture. Neither Mary nor Jesus modified their actions in front of the detractors. On the contrary, Lazarus' beautiful sister, who had painted her fingernails and toenails with a reddish yellow powder², had thrown back her head and commenced passing her hands over the nape of her neck as she bent over the Rabbi's feet and flung her thick hair in front of her. Then without rushing, she wiped the Teacher's feet with her hair until they were dry and brilliant.

Unfortunately the comments had turned bitter. Judas, with clear indignation turned to Andrew—Peter's brother—and asked him a question in a way that everyone could hear.

"Why doesn't she sell the perfume and donate the money to feed the poor? You must speak to the Teacher and reprimand her for this wastefulness..."³

The cast events had taken frightened Mary. She tried to stand up, but Jesus stopped her. He put his left hand over the young woman's head and addressed the audience in a relaxed yet firm voice.

"Leave her in peace, all of you! Why does this bother you, if what she has done comes from her heart? To you who murmur and say that this unguent should have been sold and the money donated to the poor, allow me to say you will always have the poor with you so you can help them at whatever moment seems good to you. But I will not always be with you. Soon I will go to my Father!"

He focused his gaze, which no one could escape, not even in the wavering flames of the lamplight—on the eyes of Judas Iscariot and as he continued his voice became progressively louder and more emphatic.

"This woman has saved a long time for the unguent for my body at its burial. And now when it seems appropriate to do the anointing in anticipation of my death, no one must deny her such satisfaction. In doing this Mary has been reproached by everyone when this act is evidence

¹ That night, when we were in Lazarus' house, Mary showed me the container. In effect, it was a kind of small jug, which was beautifully made with a maximum capacity of 30 grams. (It was much larger than the standard bottle of Coca-Cola.) I asked her to let me wet a spare piece of linen in the remains of the perfume. In a few days, during my required visit to the module, (I had to prepare for the second phase of my exploration), the onboard system analyzed the essence and confirmed it was a herbaceous plant in the valerian family which was cultivated in gardens. Its grey to grayish black colored root naturally grew in small, short fragments the thickness of a little finger. Today it is rarely made into a pure essence. It ends up as a bundle of reddish brown fibers in the shape of a spike. It has a strong congenial odor, a bitter flavor and is aromatic. It is also known as indigo tuberose, the Ganges, crosnes, and spikenard. Their tuberose has a higher density compared to this variety [Major's note].

² The Israelis made this cosmetic from the leaves and the bark of the so-called sedge bush, which is called henna by the Arabs [Major's note].

³ The jug contained about three hundred grams of the essence of Indian tuberose. Its value fluctuated around three hundred *denarii*. With two hundred *denarii* one could have fed five thousand people [Major's note].

of her faith in what I said about my death and my ascension to my Father in heaven. This woman must not be condemned for what she has done tonight. Instead, whenever they preach this gospel in the future, throughout the world they will say what she has done will be spoken of in her memory."

Mary disappeared into the courtyard and I withdrew from that place. Lazarus seemed sad. He as well as Martha knew their sister had economized for a long time in order to purchase the expensive perfume. In contrast to what I observed among the disciples, the family had understood the underlying problem and intuited this would be Jesus' final Passover.

Although the murmuring had lessened, some of the apostles continued commenting on the incident and moving their heads negatively as a sign of disagreement with the Rabbi. Judas Iscariot had fallen into an impenetrable silence. His eyes scared me. They exuded a dull, contented hatred. It jumped before one's eyes that he had taken Jesus' words as a personal reproach and undoubtedly felt ridiculed in front of everyone. In my opinion, this incident must have been the root from which the traitor began to weave his revenge against the Galilean. In those moments, I am very skeptical that Judas thought about handing Jesus over to the members of the Sanhedrin. He would not have had the idea. The Temple's police had already received concrete orders to capture him. However his vengeful spirit saw a road open that would provide him a way to try to humiliate Christ and be compensated for it.

It was nearly time for Sunday's vigil when some of the Pharisees who had cautiously remained quiet spoke to Jesus. They omitted mentioning the valuable nature of the perfume and reproached him for consenting to the woman's violation of the sacred laws of the Sabbath as a day of rest. Based upon the way I understood it, one of the regulations established that a woman "could not leave her house with a needle for making holes" in other words, one fit for sewing, nor with "a ring with a seal, nor with a hat in the shape of a snail, nor with a bottle of perfume". If she infringed this code, she was required to pay a fine and offer a sacrifice to compensate for her sin. Jesus observed the priests with amusement.

"Tell me," he asked them, "where did you come from?"

"From Jerusalem" they declared.

"And how is it possible for you to condemn a woman who has walked less than one stadium, when you have journeyed for more than fifteen?"

Then I remembered the Hebrews had a trick for saving two thousand codos or one kilometer, which was the maximum distance permitted for travel on Saturday. But Jesus knew that while the simple village could practice the *erub* the "holy" or the "separate" that were publically assumed to be extremely pure had no qualms about infringing the laws when they were engaged at a large feast.

The Pharisees shifted around nervously. But Christ was not ready to concede them any quarter. Nearly all of the five thousand members of the community or brotherhood of the Pharisees in Israel were merchants, artisans, or landowners who lacked a solid training in the religious writings and who based their strict rules on purity and the payment of the tenth. They had elevated themselves above the people of the land or the majority of ordinary people in the tribes of Israel. This pride and hard heartedness was not something the Rabbi from Galilee supported. And he was not slow in proclaiming it under their noses to the delight of a few

nervous bystanders, especially those closest to them who were afraid of the ire of those who allege they are the "representatives of the village."

"Oh you Pharisees," Jesus lashed out valiantly. "You are like a dog bedding down in the oxen's manger: he can't eat, nor does he allow the oxen to eat."

"Who are you," fenced a representative of Caiaphas with an air of smugness, "to teach us where the truth is?"

"Why did you leave camp?" the Nazarene attacked. "Perhaps it was to see a cane flutter in the wind, to see a man dressed in fancy clothes? Your kings, your great personalities and you yourselves, who are dressed in silk and purple, I say you cannot know the truth. Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel and we carry on their example."

The guests turned their faces toward Jesus. But the Galilean proceeded unperturbed. His dominion over the situation had constricted the Pharisees' spirits.

"You talk about those who are dead and you reject the one who is living with you?"

"Tell us who you are so we may believe in you," they replied.

"You could scrutinize heaven and Earth and still you would not know who is among you." And turning his gaze towards me he added, "You will not know if you examine this time."

A wave of blood rose up from my belly.

The Pharisees decided to stand up and thereby renounce a continuation of this dialectical battle. Between expressions that conveyed their indignation, they cleaned their hands in their individual wash bowls. But Jesus was not finished. Before they could abandon the place, he skewered them.

"Oh you Pharisees! You wash the outside of the cup without understanding that he who has made the outside has also made the inside."

It began to be very clear to me why the priest caste, the scribes and the Pharisees had plotted to arrest and kill this man.

The stormy dinner culminated practically with the priests' exit. When the guests were saying farewell to Simon, Peter approached the Teacher with a conciliatory air and proposed that Mary be removed from the group.

"Women are unworthy of life," he proclaimed.

The Nazarene must have been as perplexed as me. And in the same tone he replied to the impulsive disciple.

"I will guide her to make her a man for her living spirit is also transformed, similar to that of you men. Since all women who make themselves men, will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

That night I retired to my room and established a connection with the module. Eliseo announced a cold front had already entered from the west and according to the forecast for Sunday, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem would most likely be threatened by rain.

SUNDAY APRIL 2

That Saturday night I needed time to get to sleep. There had been too many emotions... Above all, there was something that worried me. Why did Jesus make that statement about women? After much deliberation, I can only arrive at one conclusion: the Nazarene was aware of women's depressing social situation and offered to vindicate them. In my studies prior to Operation Trojan Horse, I had observed that in the entire Orient-Israel was no exception—a woman's paper in social and public life was worth zero. Yet what the texts and documents I handled during my preparation revealed was very different from reality. Based on the little I saw, men's disdain towards their companions was something that cried out to heaven.

For example, when a Jewish woman leaves her house—it does not matter why—she must have her face covered by a hat which consisted of two veils over her head, a string net, a diadem over her forehead with ribbons hanging down from it to the tip of her chin and tied into a knot. This way no one could see the details of her face. There is an important tale among the Hebrews about a priest from Jerusalem who did not recognize his own wife enough to impute the proceedings when she was suspected of adultery. (A few days later, I had the magnificent opportunity to witness a sad and fanatical tradition the Jews call the “bitter waters” which helped me to comprehend Jesus' revolutionary position with respect to Hebrew women a little better.)

The woman who leaves her home without wearing a cover over her head commits an offense against the good tradition to the extent that, according to law doctorates, her husband has the right to dismiss her without being obliged to pay the sum stipulated for a divorce. But I am advised that, in this respect, the rules are so strict for women that their heads are covered inside their own homes. This was the case with tal Qimjit, who according to the account, saw seven of her sons become high priests and considered this a divine reward for her austerity. ‘You can say this and that about me,’ she said modestly, ‘but not even the rafters in my house have seen my head uncovered.’

A woman can appear with her head uncovered only on her wedding day if she is a virgin—not a widow—and is with an entourage. When she is among the Israelites, it is unnecessary for her to speak, especially in the city where people must pass by her unacknowledged in public. In one of the works of Joseph ben Yochanan which was written toward the end of the year 150 AD, the author managed to say, ‘You cannot say much to a woman. The value of your own woman is considerably more than that of your neighbor's woman.’

The rules of proper etiquette included prohibitions against meeting alone with a Hebrew woman and looking at or greeting a married woman. It was dishonorable for a student of the scriptures to talk to a woman on the street. This rigidity was taken to such an extreme that a Jewish woman, who enjoyed greeting everyone on the street or greeting them from the doorway of her house where she sat knitting, could be ostracized without receiving the payment stipulated in her marriage contract.

The predicament of a woman at home did not seem to be a modification of her public conduct. For example, a daughter must always yield the first place, including the passage through doors, to the boys. Her education was strictly limited to domestic work such as sewing and weaving. The youngest sisters were in charge of caring for the father. Which made them responsible for feeding him, giving him drinks, dressing him, covering him, taking him in and out when he was elderly, and washing his hands, face and feet. In regard to their inheritance, their

rights were not the same as those of the males. The patriarch's rights were extraordinarily great prior to the wedding of the youngest daughter. They derived their power through their father. At that time Jewish society distinguished stages: the minor, who was up to 'twelve years and one day'; the teenager (between twelve and 12.5 years) and the adult (after 12.5 years). Before a child attains the age of 12.5 years, the head of the family has all of the authority – not the youngster—but although young, they could already be betrothed or divorced. Based upon this social code, daughters do not have the right to own absolutely anything: not even the products of her work, not even if she found something on the street. Everything belonged to the father. Until the age of 12.5 years, a daughter could not reject a marriage imposed by her father. There is the case where she can be married to a deformed man. The rabbinical document *Ketubot* includes a discussion of some reckless fathers who forgot whom they had promised their daughters to...

A father can sell his daughter as a slave before she turns twelve. Betrothals were only celebrated at a very early age. Generally one year after the daughter has celebrated the wedding, the power passes from her father to her husband. (And I actually do not know which could be worse.) After the "buy-sell contract", for this is the foundation of the betrothal and matrimony, the woman goes to live in her husband's house. Consequently, this posits a new accountability indeed the clash with the other family, which is strange to her and nearly always manifests an open hostility toward the new arrival. To tell the truth, the difference between a wife and a slave or a concubine is that one has a marriage contract at her disposal and the other one does not. In exchange for a few rights, the wife finds herself loaded with duties. She must grind grain, sew, wash, cook, raise the children, make her husband's bed and, as a contribution to her sustenance, spin and weave. They add further obligations including washing her husband's face, hands, feet, and preparing his drinks. The power of the husband and the father went to the extent that, in the event of danger of death, she must save the male first, before herself.

The law also permits polygamy. So the wife must endure the presence and constant affront of one or more concubines. As for divorce, that right lies only and exclusively on behalf of the husband. Logically this can occur if there is constant abuse. From the religious perspective, I suppose the Israeli woman is not on the same level as a man either. If one examines all of the regulations in the Torah, the severity of the civil laws and penalties—including the death penalty—women do not have access to any type of religious teaching. Furthermore, a maxim of R. Eliezer was, "one who teaches the Torah (the law) to their daughters her libertinism." This "eminent" doctor who lived to the year 30 A.D. even advised, "It is better to burn the Torah, than to transmit it to women."

In the house women were not counted in the total number of invited guests—just as I had the opportunity to witness during the banquet hosted by Simon, "the leper". Women did not have the right to present testimony at a trial. They were simply "considered to be liars... natural liars." The rabbinical writings from the *Kiddushin* (82b) to the *Niddah* (31b) affirm, "Wretched are those whose children are girls."

By merely knowing about the deplorable social environment in which Jewish women live so badly, one could reach an understanding of the measure of Jesus' justified valor in surrounding himself with women, conversing with women, and instructing and teaching them like men. I remained surprised by the fact that the Rabbi from Galilee had not only selected twelve males, but had also endeavored to go travel with another group of women (which totaled about ten) who followed the teacher wherever he went. This fact, like the others I was discovering little by little, had clearly not been included in the canonical gospels that we know.

Just as I had mentioned to Eliseo in our last auditory connection, it was indeed overcast at dawn on Sunday April 2. A fine rain made the temperature considerably fresher, gave a special brilliance to the countryside and perfumed Bethany with the pleasant smell of earth.

Soon it was possible for me to go to Simon's house. The Teacher had called his men and women early in the morning and joined them in the garden. There the giant's countenance was more serious than on previous occasions. He gave them concrete instructions about facing the upcoming observance of Passover. He especially insisted that they not carry out a public demonstration while they were inside the Holy City and, most importantly, that they not leave his side.

Once again, the disciples associated these measures precautions with the Sanhedrin's proclamation for his capture. As I mentioned before, Jesus knew some of his men were going to be permanently armed. However, he did not make any reference to their blades.

When Jesus Christ began reviewing what had been his ministry from his ordination in Capernaum to the present day, I observed how Judas Iscariot turned deaf ears to him and devoted his attention to counting the contents of the common purse. A little later, he left the group and went into the house. At dawn that very morning, David Zebedee, who was the brother of John and Stephan, and one of the most active collaborators with Jesus and whom I refer to by and by, had delivered the proceeds from the successful sale of the campsite that they had resided some weeks earlier in Pella which was located on the eastern border of Jordan about forty miles from the Dead Sea.

The communal purse must have been sufficiently important since Judas left it with our venerable that morning. It seems the group's "administrator" considered it inadvisable to bring so much money during Jesus' imminent entrance into Jerusalem. In reality, the dates for the Passover were when the Israelis were required by an ancient law to satisfy what they called the "second tenth". In other words, apart from the offering made in the Temple and the first tenth¹, every Hebrew was obliged to consume or spend a "second tenth", in accordance with one's economic means, inside of Jerusalem. This was unavoidable. As I said, if a Jew lived far from the Holy City he should convert the "second tenth" into money and bring it to Jerusalem where he must spend it on food and drink precisely during the observance of Passover. (The Mishnah devotes five chapters to what one can and cannot do with the said "tax".)

Judas was perfectly aware of this obligation and, presumably after counting the "balance" of the general funds, he had separated the money which must be spent in Jerusalem in anticipation of the "second tithe". However, the fact that he left it in Simon's hands meant he must have understood that Jesus and his followers were going to tarry a few days before departing for Jerusalem in order to attend the traditional Passover dinner. Although it was only a question

¹ In compliance with the rabbinical arrangements, once half of one fiftieth of the crop harvested from the field was separated and surrendered to the priests for the *terumah gedolah* offering, the rest was divided into a tenth which was called the "first tenth" or "tenth for the Levites". The Pentateuch refers to it in several passages: "All of the tenth part of the land as well as the seeds and the fruit from the trees is from the Lord; it is a sacred thing from the Lord" [Leviticus 27:30]. "And give all of the tithes to the sons of Levi as an inheritance for the services they perform and for their care of the tabernacle for the assembly" [Numbers 18:21]. The Mishnah dedicates five chapters to a minute account of the "first tenth": "Which fruits are subject to the tithe; when it must be done; when one can eat the fruit without separating the tenth, how to apply the tithe in the event of replanting, sales, making use of by products and the relation of wild plants in reference to the obligation to pay the tenth" [Major's note].

of a very personal conjecture—I never tried to investigate the possibility that Christ had already had a discussion with Judas about the money, as well as the exact day for the said Passover rite.

Over the next few days, when I visited Jerusalem I understood the reason why the natives of the Holy City put such a great importance on the presence of thousands of pilgrims, who arrive from all of the provinces and from foreign lands. And I apprehended the economic benefit represented by the fact that each Hebrew had to spend a part of his annual revenue during Passover. The resulting amount of money was always considerable. If we reflect that the “second tenth” was drawn from the overall profits from sales of cattle, crops, and vineyards for a total of four years as well as the works of artisans.

Jesus finished his talk early with, “I will still leave you with many watch words and lessons..., before I return to my father.” But in the end the disciples did not stop to figure out exactly what he was referring to while he was speaking. Ultimately, no one dared to ask a single question.

Once the “conference” had concluded, Christ took Lazarus, who had accompanied me to Simon’s house, aside and recommended that he make the necessary preparations to leave Bethany. We, Jesus, and the resurrected man himself knew that after the miracle, the Sanhedrin had conferred and reached a judgment: Lazarus must be eliminated.

“What is the use of arresting and executing the Galilean if his friend, who is living proof of the exceptional miracle, still lives?” This exposition—which was not lacking in logic—had motivated the priests to plan a parallel action which would culminate in Lazarus’ arrest.

My friend obeyed and a few days later fled to the community at Philadelphia in an area farther east than the fertile Perea. When the Sanhedrin’s police came to arrest him, only Martha, Mary, and their servants were in the house.

For the rest of the morning, the Rabbi preferred to rest in the densest part of Simon’s garden. The same evening, when he returned to Bethany, I had the courage to ask him why he chose that particular manner to enter the Holy City. The Teacher knew the scriptures perfectly. “I do it this way in order to fulfill the prophecies...” he responded plainly.

Indeed in Genesis [49:11] as well as Zachariah [9:9], it is said that the Messiah, the liberator of Jerusalem would come from the Mount of Olives mounted on a donkey. Zachariah specifically proclaimed, “Rejoice mightily oh Daughter of Zion! Shout oh Daughter of Jerusalem! Look our king has come to us. He is just and he brings salvation. He comes as the lowest do; riding on an ass, on a donkey, the offspring of an ass.”

Toward the sixth hour (noon), after a frugal lunch, Jesus, who had recovered his excellent cheery humor from the previous day—asked Peter and John to go ahead as far as Bethpage.

“When you reach the crossroads, you will find a donkey, the offspring of an ass,” he directed. “Untie the donkey and bring it here.”

“But, sir,” Peter argued reasonably, “what are we going to say to the owner?”

“If anyone asks you what you are doing, simply say ‘The Teacher needs him.’”

Peter was already accustomed to perplexing situations; so he shrugged his shoulders and set out to Bethpage. But John stayed silent, almost taciturn (with the confidence of the youngest of the twelve). He stood there as lean as a cane with his carbon black eyes contemplating his idol for a short while. I detected surprise and a certain fear in his expression. What was the Teacher plotting?

Suddenly he realized Peter had gone to the door and left. He started with a jump and departed on the road in pursuit of his friend. But then David Zebedee, one of the most efficient of all Christ's followers—which counted for nothing with the Teacher and the twelve—had the brilliant intuition to start on the road to Jerusalem and, in the company of other believers, alert the pilgrims to Jesus imminent arrival. It was later demonstrated that this initiative made a definite contribution to the Teacher's massive and triumphant entrance into the Holy City. In addition to the hundreds of people who came to Bethany each day, thousands of natives of Jerusalem, and recent arrivals for Passover had just received courteous tidings about the presence of the Galilean who performed miracles and had enough courage to land in the high priest's face.

It was unnecessary to wait any longer. At 1pm, Peter and John rejoined the retinue that was waiting for them outside Lazarus' house. Exactly as the Teacher had predicted, when Peter arrived in Bethpage, there were two animals there: an ass and her offspring.

The truth is, since he knew the community and his people, who were all his fervent followers—finding the aforementioned donkeys and convincing their owner to loan them to the Rabbi must not be considered as performing a miracle. At least that was my impression. If there was something which distinguished Bethany and Bethpage from the rest of the districts in Israel it was this: the residents' deep affection for and fierce faith in Christ. Lazarus confessed to me that he was convinced this particular miracle of the Nazarene was possibly the most extraordinary of all the ones he manifested during his public life. It had set the stage in Bethany not so that the people would believe, rather because they already believed. This theory was not bad. Cities that were more significant than Nazareth such as Capernaum, Jerusalem, etc. had rejected Jesus. Basically, according to Peter's account, as he was about to untie the donkey, the owner appeared. When he asked them why they were doing that, the disciples identified themselves. Then, without saying anything else, the Hebrew replied, "If your teacher is Jesus of Galilee, take him the donkey."

When I the little brown haired donkey (it was scarcely a meter high and the name for its race was possibly *silvestre* which is very common in African and Asia) appeared, everyone present had the same question: Why did the Teacher need this offspring of an ass? Jesus had pounded the roads with only the help of his strong legs which would have been the envy of many marathon runners today.... A short while later, as I saw him parade on the back of the donkey in front of the multitude that crowded around the road and through the streets of Jerusalem, I began to suspect the real reason which prompted Jesus to search for the small animal's assistance. Without further delay, the Teacher gave them orders to leave for Jerusalem. The twins laid their mantles across the donkey's back in a gesture that Jesus acknowledged with a smile. The donkey ceased its munching while the giant climbed astride its back. Then the Nazarene took the rope which functioned as a rein and gently touched the donkey's sides with his heels, urging it to advance.

The Rabbi's considerable stature forced him to bend his long legs back so his feet would not drag on the road. With all of my respect for him, his figure riding on the donkey was a total spectacle: half ridiculous, half comical. I was gradually starting to realize that this was precisely one of the effects the Teacher seemed to seek. In the Asian as well as the Roman tradition, kings

and heroes always entered cities mounted on spirited steeds or decorated chariots. Some of the Jewish prophecies included a king—a Messiah—who would enter Jerusalem like a strong liberator and take the yoke of foreign domination off of Israel.

But what type of feeling would be provoked in a town by a man of his size mounted on a donkey? Undoubtedly one of the reasons for entering the Holy City this way was a desire, an intentional aspiration to ridicule the current power structure. And Jesus was going to achieve this... At the onset the men in his group as well as the ten or twelve women chosen by Jesus who had formed a procession, were baffled. But the Teacher was unpredictable and they loved him above all. So they joined in the act with a sense of resignation. Jesus himself contributed—and not a little—to unloading his loyal followers' anxieties with his constant jokes. And I was surprised to observe how the Nazarene could laugh at his own shadow.

The intensity of the festive atmosphere increased with our distance from Bethany. A crowd that we had not anticipated had been gathering on both sides of the road. It greeted, cheered and acknowledged Christ as the "Prophet from Galilee".

The twelve who surrounded the Rabbi (including Peter, Simon the Zealot, Judas Iscariot and Andrew) had adopted precautions. They tightened their circle and returned their swords to their waistbands; they were stupefied. Their initial fear for their leader's security and the security for the rest of the contingent was dissipating as we advanced.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of pilgrims from all over Judea, from Perea and all the way from Galilee seemed to have suddenly gone crazy. Many men removed their cloaks and spread them over the road as they smiled and showed their delight before the passing donkey. The women, children, elderly, and adults endlessly shouted as one, "Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Divine. Blessed be the reign that comes from Heaven!"

Just as I had conjectured, the people did not yell the well-known *Hoshana* for the simple reason that based upon the etymology of the original Hebrew word¹, it was a sign or an appeal for help.

I want to believe the same chill which ran down my back and caused me to tremble was also experienced by the apostles when many of the Hebrews began spontaneously cutting off branches of olive trees, greeting the Teacher and then throwing them onto his path. They also cut branches from the cinnamon trees which had violet colored flowers on them and burned them. This produced a fragrant aroma which permeated the air.

Truly none of Christ's followers could have hoped for a reception like this. Where were the Sanhedrin and their orders for his capture? Several women lifted their children and placed them in the Nazarene's arms where he caressed them ceaseless. Without a doubt Jesus' heart was happy.

But to my surprise, when the procession reached the usual road—the one I had taken to Bethany—that everyone expected us to use, Jesus and the twelve apostles turned right and began ascending the eastern slope of Mount Olivet. I had no objection to this dangerous, steep trail which served as a short cut. After a few meters, Jesus voluntarily jumped nimbly off of the

¹ This includes the familiar "Hoshana to the son of David" which appears in the evangelical canons. It seems to be a subsequent concession made by the primitive church based on Psalm [118:25] and which serves as a profession of faith exactly as noted quite accurately by Leonardo Boff [Major's note].

donkey at will and continued the ascent to the top of the “mountain of olives” on foot. The rain had stopped for a while, yet the sky was full of menacing black clouds.

My heart somersaulted during the time the group stretched out in a single file line as they walked between the olive groves. But the module was located on a much higher peak of Mount Olivet, on one of the crags where there was no warning on the path. I always considered the possibility of the participants in that tumultuous manifestation of jubilation could penetrate the “cradle’s” security barrier. I instinctively left the trail and warned Eliseo about the procession’s proximity.

The Teacher stopped when he reached the summit. I breathed a sigh of relief as soon as I saw that the module’s “point of contact” was much farther to the right and approximately thirty feet from where we stood.

From here Jerusalem was in an exceptional position. Its entire splendor was visible. The towers of Antonia’s Fortress, Herod’s palace, and above them all, the Temple’s cupola, and walls had been tinged yellow by the afternoon sunlight. This light emphasized the mosaic of houses and narrow greyish white streets. A sudden silence glided over the procession. It was barely broken by the noise which rose from the motley bunch of Israelites who ran from the Fountain Gate and the Pottery Gate which were south of the city walls announcing the prophet’s arrival.

Suddenly Christ’s demeanor changed. His open, contagious good humor turned into extreme seriousness. The disciples perceived this, but they simply did not comprehend the Rabbi’s reasons. It was all that they had asked for...

The silence was total, almost agonizingly so as we gathered together and Jesus of Nazareth walked to the edge of the eastern side of Mount Olivet and began to cry. It was a gentle weeping without any stridence. The tears ran softly down the Nazarene’s cheeks and into his beard. I shuddered and a sharp knot formed in my throat.

With his arms hanging limply in his long tunic Christ did not try to avoid his emotion.

“Oh, Jerusalem! If only you had known, at least on this day, the things pertinent to your peace and that you held the power to be so free... But now, this glory is on the point of being hidden from your eyes... You are on the verge of rejecting the Son of Peace and turning your back on the evangelist of salvation... Soon the days will come when your enemies will dig a trench around you and besiege you from all sides... Your complete destruction will be to the extent that one stone will not be left on top of another stone. And all of this will happen because you did not know the time of your divine visit... You are about to reject the gift of god and you will reject all of the men” he proclaimed in a choked voice.

Obviously, none of those who listened to these words could even guess the tragic end the Rabbi prophesized. Thirty-six years later, from the years 60 AD to 70 AD the Roman general Titus Flavius Vespasianus first fell on Israel with three hidden legions and numerous auxiliary troops from the north. His son would finish off the destruction of the Temple and a good part of Jerusalem in the midst of a bloodbath. More than eighty thousand men, who were members of the fifth, tenth, twelfth, and fifteenth legions and were reinforced by the cavalry, arrived at the city before the full moon in the spring of the year 70 AD. After the carnage of battle, in August of the same year, the Romans planted their insignias in the Jews’ holy place. In September just as Jesus had warned, one could not find one stone on top of another in the city which had been “the world’s navel”. According to Tacitus’ calculations, about six hundred thousand Hebrews had

come to Jerusalem to observe the traditional Passover. Very well, the historian Flavius Josephus alleges the number of prisoners in the place increased to 97,000, excluding the ones who fled or were crucified. He adds that in the course of three months 115,000 Israeli cadavers passed through just one of the city's gates. Those who survived were sold as slaves and dispersed.

The Nazarene's tears and laments were more than justified...

John Zebedee, the disciple who was dearest to Jesus, undoubtedly for his innocence and generosity, approached the Teacher with his heart shaken and extended a handkerchief he used to wipe the sweat off of his face. But he only kept randomly knotting it up in his hands. Without saying a single word more Christ dried his tears, mounted the donkey and began the descent into the city.

The flood of people we saw from the summit had already climbed up the slope as they intensified their cheers.

Jesus, who was heavily guarded by his men, responded to their expressions of affection, however each time it was more difficult. The crowd which flowed like a torrent out of Jerusalem's walls was not content to only cheer him from both sides of the road. Many of them, especially children and adolescents swirled around the little donkey in an orbit which forced the disciples to push and shout to open a passage between them. It was delirium!

The boisterousness upset things to such a magnitude for Hebrews in the city and the campers who had broken camp that in a little while, as the procession struggled to cross under the arch of the Fountain Gate at Jerusalem's southern tip, a group of Pharisees and Levites, who were alerted by the tumult and who, according to all indications, left precipitously with the idea of arresting the imposter as he made an appearance among the crowd. The Temple police, armed with swords and maces, waited expectantly for the priests' orders. But the clamor and enthusiasm of thousands of Jews was such that, they must have deliberated more calmly and found it prudent to let Jesus and his followers pass. With an enviable astuteness, the rabbi had avoided a more tumultuous entrance by using the northeast area of Jerusalem. From the summit of Mount Olivet, his access into the Holy City would have been much faster except for the Cedron's dry channel, if he had gone through the so-called Forensic Gate or the East Gate on the side next to the eastern city walls. However, that maneuver involved the latent risk of travelling very close to Antonia's Fortress which was where the Roman forces had their headquarters and general barracks during the occupation. Alternatively, if he had made his triumphal entrance through the southernmost district Jesus would have been forced to pass through some of the streets in the most populated part of the city short of the old capital. Although I never managed to ask him about this, in consideration of the imposing demonstration of the Jewish town knocked over with and by Jesus¹ I am certain the Teacher wished direct his steps across that sector of Jerusalem for precisely two reasons: it would allow him to receive the most prolonged warm welcome—which would protect

¹ Based on estimates from *The Mishnah* our central computer had prepared calculations to predict how many Hebrews we could encounter those days in Jerusalem during Passover. In accordance with the average number of different atriums in the Temple, *Santa Claus* computed that 28,000 Israelites could have access to the holy enclosure in three shifts in which they also sacrificed lambs for Passover. Taking into account the fact that each sacrificial victim could be consumed by an average of ten persons, this indicates a volume of approximately 180,000 attendees in observance at Jerusalem. In conclusion, the total number of pilgrims that arrived in the Holy City varied between 100,000 and 125,000 during Passover. This gave us a rough idea of the actual number which constituted the aggregate on the path travelled by Jesus and his disciples on that Sunday afternoon on April 2 [Major's note].

him and his men while they were passing by from the Sanhedrin's orders to seize and capture Jesus. This explosion was so resounding and sincere that the priests did not dare to arrest him.

When he entered the streets of Jerusalem, the multitude became so expressive that many of the women and adolescents went to a rose garden (the only type of garden permitted in the holy City) and picked dozens of roses and then tossed them on Christ's path.

This gesture caused the Pharisees' and the scribes' perturbed spirits to overflow. They had been departing in search of the "imposter". The most audacious of them elbowed and shoved their way through to the road and blocked the Nazarene's march.

The priests raised their voices above the tumult and shouted at Jesus, "Teacher, you must reprimand your disciples and urge them to behave with more dignity!"

Without losing his composure, the Rabbi replied, "It is convenient that these children are impressed by the Son of Peace whose principles the priests have rejected. It is useless to silence them. If you did, the stones on the road would talk instead."

Angry and discouraged, the Pharisees turned around; losing their heads in the same display of violence they had used before, and walked, without a doubt, to the Temple. There, as I would verify a short while later, the Sanhedrin held one of the customary council meetings. These Sanhedrin gave their colleagues an account of what happened on the streets of the old neighborhood in Jerusalem. As Joseph from Arimathea, a member of this Sanhedrin and a Jesus' good friend, related the next morning to Andrew and the rest of the apostles, the Pharisees burst into the "carved stone" chamber (which is where the sessions of the Sanhedrin were held) exclaiming, "Look, everything we do is in vain! We have been tricked by that Galilean. The people have gone crazy for him. If we do not stop these ignorant people, the whole world will follow him.

The triumphal procession continued its march through the city's steep and narrow streets. People leaned out of windows or greeted him from terrace roofs. Many of them who had actually just seen the Nazarene for the first time asked, "Who is this man?" Then the disciples and the multitude itself would take charge and reply with a shout. "This is the prophet! Jesus of Nazareth!"

At half past three or four o'clock in the afternoon, we arrived at the long wall west of the hippodrome. Once we were south of the huge site, he asked the Alpheus twins to go the Bethpage and return the donkey to its owner. Some of the Sanhedrin's members were attracted by the incessant shouting. They peered out between the high arches of the aqueduct, which linked the temple's southwestern corner to the upper part of the city, in astonishment and contemplated how the crowd loudly asked Jesus to speak and how they shouted, proclaiming him king. The general spirit, which included that of the Nazarene's closest friends, floated the belief that he was the long-awaited liberator. For a moment I let myself wear this fantasy and imagined what would have happened of the Rabbi had acceded to the populace's endless requests...

But these were not to be; indeed, they were far from the Galilean's intentions, which were very much to the contrary. Jesus silently ignored his disciples' suggestions and entreaties for him to lead the crowd. In his peculiar way, he left the people planted and quickly entered the temple's huge esplanade through the so-called Double Gate.

The ten apostles and the women recalled Christ's command not to publicly address the Hebrews, so they reluctantly and ill-humoredly followed the Teacher inside the enclosure. I lingered for a few moments at the foot of the Temple's imposing south wall, watching as some of those who had been cheering dispersed, while hundreds of others finally decided to accompany the Messiah.

On entering the immense open area which surrounded the Sanctuary— despite having seen this formidable “rectangle” from the air— I was overwhelmed by the magnificence of the work. Herod had staked everything on the construction of this Temple. Enormous stone blocks, the largest were 4.80 x 3.90 meters, had been meticulously squared and fitted together to form the bottom rows of the ashlar. The Gentiles' spacious courtyard, that completely surrounded the Sanctuary, was itself encircled by a superb colonnade. A baluster separated the Temple from an area designated for non-Jews (this was the aforementioned courtyard for the Gentiles). Above two of the thirteen doors which led to the interior and which had a continuous guard of seven Levites, I could read warning signs written in Greek that I naturally respected at all times. They read, ‘No foreigners can enter behind this enclosure or through the wall around the Sanctuary. All who are caught violating this order will immediately be liable for punishment by death.’

The historians, such as Josephus or Tacitus, had actually not been exaggerating when they described this marvel. When one entered the gigantic “rectangle” –using the same entrance that he did—one is left dazzled by the luxury. All of the gates, the Forensic Gate, as well as the Golden Gate, and the Double, Triple and Royal Gates were covered with sheets of gold and silver. (There was only one exception; however I was unable to verify it, as it was located in the center of the Temple. It was named the Gate of Nicanor. According to Josephus and *The Mishnah*, ‘All of the doors there were golden except the Gate of Nicanor which was produced by a miracle after the others had been constructed since its bronze shone like gold.’¹)

At that hour of sunset, the rays of sunlight fall obliquely on Jerusalem. Their sharp tips strike the rooftops which are completely covered in gold; shining and flashing like a part of a fascinating, almost magical halo.

¹ The module's central computer's archive contained the following information based on the Rabbinical work *Middot* (II:3) ,which mentions that the Gate of Nicanor was located between the Women's and the Israeli's Courtyards (both of these were inside the Temple) and was made of Corinthian bronze. In agreement with this, Josephus wrote, ‘Nine of the Temple's doors, including their lintels and doorposts are completely covered in gold and silver. Only one gate is made of Corinthian bronze and this is more valuable than the others by a lot.’ If the doors are burned in an attempt to take the Temple, the metal plating will melt and the flames will not reach the wood. Continuing with the theme of sumptuousness, Flavius Josephus states that the vestibule was entirely covered with gold panels that measured ‘one hundred square cubits with the thickness of one gold denarius.’ Gold chains hung from the vestibule's rafters. There were also two tables, one was made of marble, and the other one was made of solid gold. Above the entrance hall leading to the Holy Place stretched a vine of gold which grew steadily from the donations of golden vine shoots that the priests were responsible for hanging. Furthermore, a gold mirror hung at the entrance. This had been received as a gift during the reign of Helena of Adiabene. It reflected the rays of sunlight which came through the front door, which did not have leaves. There are unique works of art behind the vestibule in the Holy Place which are trophies from Titus' triumphal entrance into Rome. Moreover there was a solid candelabrum with seven arms that weighed two talents (each talent is equivalent to 34 kilograms and 272 grams.) The table for bread offerings was solid gold and it also weighed a few talents. Finally, the inner *sanctum* should have been empty with its walls covered with gold.

Inside the Women's Courtyard, everything was resplendent with gold. There were gold candelabrams with four cups on each arm. The Temple's treasuries were full of gold and silver objects. As reported by Josephus, who recorded the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the Syrian province was inundated with such gigantic offerings of gold that the price of a “pound of gold” fell [Major's note].

There was an unusual commotion in the Gentile's courtyard—especially in the area adjacent to the colonnade at the Royal Gate. Stalls, tables, and cages of doves occupy a good part of the zone south of the great “rectangle”. There was a reason why the middle section located precisely at the foot of the Royal Gate of the esplanade was 735 feet narrower.¹ It was easy to get an idea of the sales volume when there three or four rows of vendors set up on the esplanade. I did not arrive at a definite total, but I doubt there were less than three or four hundred vendors.

The majority of them were “brokers” who dealt in the animals required for the Passover sacrifices. They sold lambs, doves, even oxen. In most cases, the vendors' stands were nothing more than a plain wooden board with cages on top of it or, when more was available, a table with legs or a folding stand. They “sang” to the public about their wares. Their products included many of the items needed for the Passover sacrifice and ritual: oil, wine, salt, bitter herbs, walnuts, toasted almonds, and marmalade too. In the center of this open air market I could distinguish a long line of tables belonging to the “money changers”. These were mostly Greeks and Phoenicians engaged in currency exchange. The fact that thousands of the Jewish pilgrims were residents of foreign lands had all but required these “bankers” to be present. There I saw Greek money (silver *tetradrachm*, Attic *didrachm*, *drachma*, *oboloi*, *chalkoi*, and bronze *leptons* or “small change”; as well as Roman silver *denarii*, Latin *sestertii*, *dupondii*, *asses* or *Assarii*, *semis* and *quandrans*; and naturally all varieties of Judaic currency: silver *denarii*, *ma'ah*, and *pundiya*, and bronze *asses*, *musmis*, *kuntri* and *prutot*, among others.

These “money changers” offered an important service, since they provided the money on-site that the Hebrews needed to satisfy the required tax or contribution to the Temple's treasury. Their presence at this location was as old as it was tolerated. I make these preliminary remarks because on the following day, Monday April 3, I was going to be an exceptional witness of a historical event: the infamous “expulsion of the Temple's merchants by Jesus”, which, judging from what I could see, was not accurately described by the gospels.

While the Teacher and his disciples passed by the sellers' stalls contemplating their preparations for Passover, I took the opportunity to exchange some of my gold nuggets for equal parts of Roman and Hebrew currency. After no small amount of bargaining with one of those damned Phoenician speculators, I received a total of twelve *aurei*², forty silver *denarii* and several *asses* of fractional currency which nearly filled half of my purse.

As I contemplated the Rabbi from Galilee surrounded by his friends peacefully mingling with hundreds of merchants, I was hit with a disturbing doubt: How could Jesus be so calm and natural with these “money changers” and “brokers”, when the evangelists report that in one of his many visits to the Temple, he began to whip to them and made their tables fly through the air. The simple, logical explanation would arrive the very next day...

Gradually the crowd that had followed him into the great esplanade which surrounded the Sanctuary was forgetting about the Nazarene. So the Teacher, accompanied by his disciples, entered the Temple via the Corinthian Gate, and I lost sight of him as he went inside. I had no alternative but to wait in the Courtyard for the Gentiles. This situation prevented me from being present at the famous scene with the widow who, at that moment, must have been visiting one of the “brushes” or collection boxes where the Jews made donations to support the Temple. Once

¹ This is about 245 meters [JJB's note].

² Each *aureus* or gold *denarius* is approximately equal to thirty silver *denarii* [Major's note].

the group had departed, Andrew told me the lesson Jesus had just given them which, in essence, had been correctly related by the evangelists.

What I did not know was that these thirteen “brushes” were strategically placed in the Women’s Courtyard. (Jewish women could not pass from that area to the Men’s or the Priest’s Courtyards.) These containers had large trumpet-shaped mouths and narrow bottoms to protect their contents from thieves. A man called Pethahiah was in charge of a third of these collection boxes. He was responsible for the bird sacrifices and he controlled the money which was deposited in every third receptacle. (In lieu of making an animal offering, Jews could donate the cash equivalent.)

Well, this Pethahiah, whose real name was Mordecai, had received his nickname on account of his extraordinary talent as a polyglot. He knew more than seventy languages! The word “Pathach” means “open” which is to say he “opened” the words to interpret them. Andrew’s allusion to him was going to prove highly advantageous to me days later, because the Pethahiah was going to play a prominent role in one of Peter’s denials.

While I waited for the group to exit the Sanctuary, I sat very close to the merchants and I could see a phenomenon which was apparently extremely common in a sale. Many of the “brokers” cruelly abused the meekest Hebrews, who came to buy a turtledove for nine or ten asses. (If we consider that the average price of these birds in Jerusalem was an eighth of a *denarius* or three *asses*, the profits these usurers made were disproportionally large.)¹

However, what was even more irritating was that this healthy business was owned by the powerful family of Annas, the former high priest. Perhaps this explains the tolerance for the trade in sacrificial animals in this place, despite the sanctity of it. (This observation was also going to be vitally important for understanding what would happen the next day.)

Disgusted with the “brokers” miserable attitudes, I tried to distract myself by focusing on the maximum number of the details which surrounded me. I counted the number of columns in the Royal Gate: there were 162 graceful pilasters in the Corinthian style. The balustrades had been carved out of stone. One of these, which measured three codos or 157.5 centimeters tall, separated the inner courtyard from the outer courtyard which was accessible to us, the heathens. In some areas the exterior banisters had been engraved with the same warning I had read above several of the entrances to the Temple. The porticos which enclosed this immense esplanade were carefully paved with different colored stones and covered with cedar wood panels which had probably been brought from the Lebanese forests.

When I saw the disciples first appear, a group of Greeks who had arrived in Jerusalem a few days ago and who, I assumed, had heard Jesus talk, approached Philip and expressed their desire to meet the Teacher. Jesus had still not left the Temple and the disciple consulted the apostle who held the moral authority of the group until after the Galilean’s resurrection: this was Andrew, Peter’s brother. This fisherman’s sincerity had caught my attention from the onset. He almost always appeared silent as if he were preoccupied and distant. Perhaps his introversion was due to his rudimentary culture or his accentuated timidity. He was slightly thinner than his brother and more or less the same height of about 1.61 meters. His head was small and his fine, abundant

¹ When I asked Andrew about the amount of money the widow had deposited in the Temple’s collection box, he said he believed he saw a total of two *leptons* or a quarter of an *as*. In other words, it was purely small change. One portion of daily bread costs a couple of *asses* in Jerusalem. Typically with one *as* they could purchase two birds [Major’s note].

hair was different from Peter's as he suffered from extreme baldness. He always appeared neatly clean shaven. Presumably he was older than Peter, but Peter's baldness made him seem to be the eldest.

Andrew listened in silence to his companion's message and, after observing the group of Greeks, went back inside the Sanctuary with Philip. Soon Jesus came out and chatted happily with these Gentiles. Some of the Greeks knew about the Rabbi's mysterious announcement about his own death and they asked him about it.

Jesus responded, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if the grain of wheat thrown on the ground does not die, it remains alone; but if it dies it yields much grain..."

"Is it necessary to die in order to live?" asked one of the Gentiles who was visibly surprised at the Teacher's words.

"He who loves his life," answered Jesus, "loses it. He who hates this world will have eternal life."

"And what will happen to us when you are gone?" the Greeks asked again.

"Whoever is close to me is close to the fire. Whoever is far from me is far from life."

One of the listeners interrupted the Galilean and replied that these words were similar to the one in an old Greek saying attributed to Aesop: *Whoever is close to Zeus is close to the light.*

"The difference between me and Zeus," the Teacher remarked, "is that I can give what no eye can see, what no ear can hear, and something that a hand can never touch, and it has never entered into the heart of man. If some of you want to serve me," he concluded, "follow me. Where I am, you, my servant will be there also. If someone serves me, my father will honor him..."

But the Greeks did not seem very ready to follow the Rabbi's orders and in the end they went away.

Without attempting to hide his sadness, Jesus commented to his disciples, "Now my soul is tormented. What can I say? Father save me from this hour!"

However Christ appeared to immediately regret these thoughts. So in a loud voice, that all of his followers could hear, he added, "But this hour is the reason I came..." and he turned his face up to the cloudy sky over Jerusalem and shouted, "Father, glorified be your name!"

What happened next is not something I know exactly how to explain. No sooner had he pronounced these rending words, than the bottom of the inside of the cumulonimbus clouds which covered the city produced a kind of lightning or flash. Eliseo confirmed the clouds were at an average altitude of six thousand feet. It could not have been his powerful, metallic voice that we heard afterwards. I have attributed it to a possible electrical spark, which is quite common with a type of cloud storm. But as I said, it was almost in unison with the "flash". Hundreds of people who were in the huge esplanade could hear a voice which said, in Aramaic, "May he be praised and glorified again."

The crowd, the disciples and I stood in awe. Finally people started to react. The majority of them tried to calm down and reassure themselves that “it” had only been thunder. But in the bottom of our hearts, all of us knew thunder did not talk...

The Hebrews rushed to gather around the Teacher who announced, “This voice has not come for me, but for you. Now the one who is the judge of this world is going to be expelled by the first of this world. And I who have been lifted from the Earth, will draw all men to me...”

But, just as I feared, the mob did not understand a single word. His own disciples looked at one another as if to say: What is he talking about?

Some of the high priests, who had left the Sanctuary when they heard the enigmatic voice, retorted that they knew the Law said the Messiah would live forever. Without flinching, Jesus turned to these recent arrivals and answered, “Yet in a little more time, I will be the light among you, Walk while you have light and the darkness will not overtake you. The one who walks in the dark does not know where to go. While you have the light, believe in it and you will be children of the light.”

The Temple’s representatives attacked as they tried to ridicule Jesus. “We are the priests. We have the authority to teach them the law and the truth.”

The Rabbi pointed his right hand at the crowd and countered, “You are blind! You see the mote in your brother’s eye, but you don’t see the beam in your own eye. When you have managed to remove the plank from your own eye, then you will clearly see and can remove the speck from their eyes.”

Then Jesus crossed the Temple walls followed by his closest friends. It would soon be nightfall and the Teacher traversed Jerusalem’s old neighborhood, as was his custom, on his way to the Fountain Gate with the intention of lodging in Bethany.

During the Nazarene’s triumphant entrance into the city the congestion had been so extreme that I honestly scarcely had the opportunity to focus on the streets and buildings. Now the situation was different. At a distance of 195 meters from the hippodrome’s outer wall, the group slipped through the old city’s narrow alleys, which were nearly all downhill, almost in a single file line. Jerusalem was then divided into two large districts, the one we were currently circumnavigating was known as the souq-ha-tajton or Akra) and the other district which was located in the northeast was called souq-ha-elyon or the Upper District. Both if these “cities” were separated by a valley or depression named the Tyropoeon Valley. The root “souq” describes the nature of both places: this word means “bazaar”. And this is what I could see there and in subsequent trips through Jerusalem: there were a great number of bazaars where they sold everything was sold.

Each one of the city’s districts is covered by main roads decorated with colonnades. This was the site of the Upper District’s huge commercial area, while the small street market was in the old city.¹ These two commercial arteries were joined by a swarm of cross streets which created a labyrinth. From this network of narrow streets, most of which were without paving or drains, there wafted a stench that was a mixture of burnt oil and poor stews. People threw urine into the center of the roads and nearly all of the thousands of homes that were stacked beside the road had a single story and crumbling walls.

¹ This was near what is currently el-Wad Street [Major’s note].

The group was always lead by Jesus who avoided dark, difficult streets and directed our steps through the widest streets in this part of lower Jerusalem. To my surprise, we suddenly entered a street that ran alongside the Pool of Siloam, was nearly eight meters wide, and perfectly paved.

The lamps and torches which were strategically placed on the walls of the houses had already begun to illuminate the Holy City. Despite the heavy darkness, the pedestrian traffic was incessant. Through the doorways of the buildings on this street which were more than two hundred meters high, I observed numerous artisans bottled up with their work or involved in interminable negotiations with potential clients. Jerusalem's noblest and most respected professionals had settled in this old quarter or Lower District. However, the heathens, unclean and "impure" had their abodes in the Upper District. The Jews' fanaticism for this sentiment had reached the extent that, for example, the spit of a resident from the Upper District was considered an impure substance while this was not the case with expectorations from the inhabitants from this area of the city. Andrew explained that all of the settlements of "fullers" or weavers' whitewashes had been uprooted from the Upper District. Apparently the entire profession was despised by the Israeli community.

Along with the large variety of shops or *sukkahs* which always formed a line in the street, were tailors, barbers, physicians or bloodletters, sandal makers, carpenters, cobblers, lamp and cookware vendors, coppersmiths, and even a manufacturer of clothes from Tarso, not forgetting the solicitous vendors of perfumes and unguents. This definitely formed a unique spectacle to which the addition of the merchants' infantile shouts, laughter, and the aroma of fried food finally succeeded in completely enveloped one in a most captivating manner.

It was at one of those open air stalls that I spontaneously decided to buy a beautiful flask of tuberosse essence. Without concealing his surprise, the good Andrew served as an opportune mediator and went on to negotiate a substantial discount for me. I paid a total of 250 denarii for the precious bottle. The little vase in question had been exquisitely carved using an ancient technique of circular polishing that the Hebrews call "liquid decanting". The engobe and burning action had reduced the glass' porosity so that it produced a shine so brilliant that at first glance it gave the impression of a glazing process.

We caught up with the Teacher and the rest of the disciples as they were passing under the archway of the Fountain Gate which was at the southern end of Jerusalem. I knew the city was a "nest" of beggars, especially in the days leading up to the Passover, but I was touched as we crossed the city's walls. Dozens of lepers were laid out for the night, wrapped in their rags and mantles, while a legion of lame, disable, distended, hunchbacked, and blind people stepped out as we went by and begged us for alms. If it had not been for Andrew, pulling me along without thinking, it is highly likely that my remaining 150 *denarii* would have gone into the hands of these supposedly unfortunate ones. I say "supposedly" because, according to Peter's brother, the vast majority of these were fakes or "professionals" who took advantage of the holiday to manipulate foreigner's hearts and "not to work".

I believe I did not fully perceive the disciples' general state of bewilderment until we had walked a little over a kilometer toward Bethany. The Teacher silently led the group of around ten people with his characteristic stride.

Not one person opened his or her mouth during the entire journey. These Galileans seemed confused, depressed, and even bad humored. I suddenly deduced the reason why. After

the tremendous unexpected reception in honor of the Teacher, the apostles did not understand why Jesus had not seized the magnificent opportunity to proclaim himself king, definitively establish his “reign” over Judea, and then extend it over the rest of the provinces. As I scrutinized their faces, it was not very difficult to imagine where their thoughts flew. Andrew, who was preoccupied with his responsibility as the group’s manager, was perhaps less prone to value the outburst of popularity in regard to the Teacher.

The truth is that in the following days some of those in the inner group—especially Peter, Stephen, John, and Simon the Zealot—had to exert a considerable effort to process so many emotions...

Simon Peter was possibly the one who was most affected by the public demonstration. And more so for the excitement it generated, than for the Teacher’s incomprehensible act of not leading the multitude, at least when they had allowed him to do so. For Peter this had been a splendid opportunity lost. While I walked to Bethany, I noticed he was distressed and sad. Yet his passion for Christ enabled him to accept the Nazarene’s strange behavior without the slightest reproach or sign of disgust.

Stephen the Zebedee’s reactions were very similar to those of Simon Peter. His initial fear had faded away as soon as we descended the slope of Mount Olivet. The sight of the crowd’s cheering for his Teacher had given him hopes for power and influence. But all of this had collapsed when Jesus dismounted the little donkey and lost the crowd when he entered the Temple. How could they so graciously renounce a golden opportunity like this?

For his part, John Zebedee was the only one who guessed Jesus’ intentions. He recalled what the teacher said on every occasion about the prophet Zachariah and described this triumphant entrance with Jesus’ true intent with some difficulty. This saved him from a good measure of the general depression produced by the traumatic finale. Besides, his blind love for the Nazarene prevented him from suspecting or even imagining that the Teacher had made a mistake.

Philip who was the “governor” and pragmatic man of the group suffered from different type of anxiety. When he saw the flood of people, for a moment he thought Jesus would provide food for them as he had at other opportunities. For this reason he felt a deep sense of relief when he realized we were leaving the procession and strolling serenely through the Temple’s grounds.

Once these fears disappeared from his mind, Philip’s feelings were in accord with those of Peter who shared the opinion that it had been a pity that Jesus had not used this occasion to permanently establish his reign. That night as they were submerged in doubts, they asked one another again about the meaning of all of these things. But their faith in the Galilean was so solid that they soon forgot about their uncertainties.

Matthew, a man who was cautious, though extremely loyal, was left marveling in front of the multi-colored outburst which surrounded the Rabbi. However, his natural skepticism repressed this and it was not long before he forgot the emotions of that Sunday afternoon. There was just one instant where Matthew was on the point of losing his characteristic calm. It occurred in a full vulgar explosion when one of the Pharisees who was publically taunting Jesus said, “Look everyone. Look who comes: the King of the Jews on a donkey.”

He was on the verge of getting out of his box and, as he confessed to me a few days later, a little short of jumping the priests. Yet, as I said, by the following morning Matthew had

overcome the general crisis and was as happy as ever. After all, he was a loser who knew how to take life philosophically.

Thomas, like Peter, walked along in a stunned state. His profound heart could not stop trying to find the reason for what, according to his criterion, was an absolutely infantile celebration. He had never seen Jesus in a tangle like that and it had left him disillusioned. For a moment the cold, pragmatic Thomas arrived at the conclusion that all of that rowdiness was only a means to a single goal: to confound the members of the Sanhedrin who, as the whole world knew, intended to seize the Teacher. And he was not wrong about the reason...

Another person who was greatly bewildered by this event was Simon the Zealot. His sense of patriotism arranged everything as a sort of dream in reference to his country's political future. He cherished the idea of liberating Israel from the Roman yoke and restoring the town's sovereignty. And he assumed Jesus must occupy David's conquered throne. As he assisted with the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, his heart trembled with emotion and he was already envisioning commanding the new kingdom's military forces.

During the descent from the Mount of Olives he also imagined executing or banishing the priests and the Sanhedrin's supporters. Without a doubt he was the apostle who shouted the most forcefully and who constantly encouraged the crowd. For now, at nightfall, it was also he who was the most humiliated, silent, and disappointed. Sadly he did not recover from this "blow" until long after the Teacher's resurrection.

No such problem existed for the Alpheus twins. For them pranks and nonchalance made a perfect day. They enjoyed themselves immensely and held this experience in their memories as "the one day they were closest to being in heaven". Their superficiality prevented sadness from germinating inside them. That afternoon was simply the culmination of all of their aspirations.

I never could find out exactly what Judas Iscariot's true feelings were. At the time I noticed indications of evident conflict and revulsion on his face. It is possible that the whole event seemed ridiculous and childish to him, just as the Greeks and the Romans considered it grotesque and scornful for any leader to be borne on a donkey. I do not believe I would be mistaken to conclude that Judas was on the point of abandoning the group there. Yet it is conceivable that he was bridled by the fact that he was the "administrator" for the group's funds. This was definite possibility since the position entailed a constant availability of money and Judas had a special penchant for gold.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic moments for the vindictive Judas was shortly before we reached the walls of Jerusalem. An important Sadducee, who was friend of Jesus' family, abruptly accosted Judas and patted him on the back as he said, "Why such a disconcerted expression my dear friend? Cheer up and join us as we announce this Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, while he enters the city gates on the back of a donkey."

That joke must have deeply wounded him. Judas could not bear the feeling of shame. This could have been another reason for him to accelerate his plan for revenge against the Teacher. The sense of being ridiculed so violently pierced the apostle that it converted him into a deserter.

With very rare exceptions, in spite of almost four years of tutelage and living with the Messiah, Christ's disciples had demonstrated that they had learned nothing but nothing from this historic event. I respected and understood Jesus' hard silence as the leader of these sunken and

perplexed men. He had found himself on the path to his death and no one seemed to grasp his message.

MONDAY APRIL 3

According to my information, very few disciples managed to fall asleep during the night of Sunday to Monday April 3. Aside from the twins, the rest of the group continued ruminating on their thoughts. The Galileans were so apathetic that they did not set up the usual watch outside the door of Simon's house where Jesus, Peter, and John stayed.

After saying farewell, each quietly proceeded to their respective lodgings. Even the Rabbi did not unfasten his lips. I suppose he must have known the state of his friends' spirits and possibly, with the intention of avoiding further tensions, he choose to dine at Lazarus' residence.

Despite the advanced hour, Mary and Martha did their utmost to accommodate us. They washed our hands and feet. Then we ate some fruit and cheese with their brother. Neither the Teacher nor I had much of an appetite. Jesus remained locked in his hermetic silence for a good while, with his eyes fixed on the red undulating flames in the fireplace.

Before I retired to rest, I begged Mary to accept the flask of essence of tuberose, which I had purchased that afternoon with Andrew. It took some work on my part, but she finally accepted it. This gesture appeared to encourage the Teacher, so that he left his enigmatic solitude and fully joined in the peaceful chat between Lazarus and me.

During our frugal repast, I described the splendid events we had experienced a few hours ago to Lazarus and his sisters. Unlike the apostles, Lazarus immediately appreciated the significance of Jesus' act. Without the symbolism, the crowd would not have done anything to "protect" the Rabbi from the Sanhedrin's claws. I did not tire of repeating this aspect of the matter. Of the gospels that I had studied, none of them had mentioned this and frankly, no one with a common feeling and a minimum of information about what occurred in those final weeks would have been able overlook the fact that the Galilean played this "operation" with consummate skill. As they say in our time, "kill several birds with one shot."

When I realized that Jesus of Nazareth was willingly contributing to the conversation, I took advantage of the opportunity by asking him for his opinion about that afternoon.

"He is in the midst of the world and he has revealed himself to them in the flesh. I have found everyone drunk. I have not found anyone who is thirsty. My soul suffers for the sons of men because they are blind in their hearts; they do not see that they have entered the world empty and that they will leave the world empty. Now they are drunk. When they vomit their wine, they will repent."

"Those are very harsh words," I said. "As harsh as the ones you spoke overlooking Jerusalem on Mount Olivet ..."

"Maybe people think I have come to bring peace to the world. They do not know I am here to throw the Earth into divisiveness, fire, the sword, and war. Well, they will have five in one house: three against two and two against three, the father against the son and the son against the father. And they will be alone."

“Many of those in my world will associate these sentences with the end of Jerusalem as well as the end of time,” I added in an attempt to make my words not sound excessively odd to Lazarus. “What do you say about this?”

“Future generations will understand that when the Son of Man returns he will not raise his hand to fight. This day will be as unforgettable as the beginning of the world: after the great tribulation, all of the tribes on Earth will see my sign in the sky. This will be my true and definitive return above the clouds in the sky, like the lightning which starts in the east and shines all the way to the west.”

“What will be the great tribulation?”

“You could call it “the birth of humanity,” Jesus did not seem very eager to reveal the details.

“At least tell us when it will take place.”

“No one knows the day and the hour, neither the angels nor the son. Only the Father knows. I can merely tell you it will be very unexpected for there will be a lot of plunder in the midst of your blindness and iniquity.”

“My world—the one I am from—tries to discern its impending manifestation by the level of confusion and injustice...”

“Your world is not better nor worse than this one. Both worlds only lack the principle that governs the universe: love.”

“At least give me a sign so we can recognize when you will reveal yourself to men for the second time.”

“In the future, when you are naked and without shame, when you are given clothes you will place them on the ground under your feet like a child, then you will walk on them and see the Son of the Living and not be afraid.”

Fortunately, Lazarus continued to equate “my world” with Greece! This permitted me to continue questioning the Teacher with a certain margin of latitude.

“However, my world is still very far from that day,” I replied. “There men are enemies of men and even of their own gods—”

Jesus did not let me continue. “There you are mistaken. God does not have enemies.”

The Nazarene’s resounding sentence brought back many memories of beliefs about a just god who condemns those who die in sin to the fiery inferno. So, I explained.

Christ shook his head and smiled. “Men have the habit of manipulating the truth. A father can feel distressed by a son’s folly, but he would never condemn his children to a permanent bad situation. The hell, which corresponds to the one they believe in in your world, signifies a part of creation, which is in the Father’s hands. Moreover, I can assure you that to believe in this is to not know the father.”

“Then why did you mention an eternal fire and the grinding of teeth on a certain occasion?”

“If I speak in parables, you don’t understand me. How, then can I teach you about the mysteries of the Kingdom? Truly, truly, I say I will make you a big bet and if you lose, you will feel like grinding your teeth.”

“Is life a bet?”

“You have said it Jason. It is a bet for love. That is the only good in game the since birth.”

I remained pensive, since these words were new to me.

“Why are you worried?” Jesus inquired.

“According to this, what can we think about those who have never loved?”

“There is no such thing.”

“What do you say about the blood-thirsty...the tyrants?”

“They also love in their own way. When they pass over to the other side, they will receive quite a shock.”

“I don’t understand.”

“When they leave this world, they will realize that no one will ask them about their crimes, riches, power, or beauty. The ones who fall, will do so based on the only valid measure on the “other side”, namely love. If you have not loved here in your time, then you and only you will feel responsible.”

“And what happens to those who haven’t known love?”

“Do you mean to say, ‘to those who have not wanted to love’?”

I felt confused again.

“My friend,” the Rabbi continued as he grasped my doubts, “Those will be the great tricksters and therefore the last in my father’s kingdom”

“Then, your god is a god of love.”

Jesus seemed to get angry. “You are god!”

“I, my Lord...?”

“In truth, I say to you, all of those who are born bear the stamp of divinity.”

“But you have not answered my question. Is god a god of love?”

“If he weren’t, he would not be god.”

“In that case, we must exclude any type of punishment or reward from his mind.”

“That is our own injustice that we develop against ourselves.”

“Teacher, I am beginning to sense your mission is very simple. Would I be wrong if I say your work is to deliver a message?”

The Nazarene smiled contentedly, placed his hand on my shoulder and replied, “I couldn’t have summarized it better.”

Without offering the least bit of commentary, Lazarus nodded his head.

“You know my heart is hard,” I added. “So would you repeat the message for me?”

“Tell your world that the Son of Man has only come to transmit the father’s will. You are his children!”

“We already know that.”

“Are you sure? Tell me Jason, what does it mean for you to be a son of god?”

I felt trapped again. I honestly did not have a sensible reply. I was not even sure god existed.

The Teacher gently intervened, “I will tell you. To have been created by the Father was the ultimate manifestation of love. He has given you everything without asking you to change anything. I have accepted the order to remind you of it. This is my message.”

“Let me think. Are we condemned to be happy regardless of what we do?”

“It’s a question of time. The world needs to understand and implement the only method: love.”

I had to ponder my second question very thoroughly. In those moments, Lazarus’ company could have posed a certain problem.

“If the purpose for your presence in the world is to fulfill a command as simple as leaving a message for all of humanity, does this mean that you don’t believe in “your church” anymore?”

“My church?” Jesus asked himself, even though, in my opinion, he had perfectly comprehended the question. “I have not had, nor do I have the slightest intention of founding a church as you seem to understand it.”

This response left me stupefied. “But you have said that the Father’s word must be spread to the ends of the Earth...”

“And the truth is that it will. Yet this does not imply that there is a condition or that the message must be bent to human will or human laws. It is impossible for a man to ride two horses

or shoot two bows. It is impossible for a servant to serve two masters. If he honors one, he will offend the other. No one who drinks old wine wants to drink new wine for a moment. No one puts new wine in old wine skins, lest they rip. Neither does one transfer old wine into new wineskins so it will not spoil. Nor does one sew an old patch on new clothes, since it would make them tear. Likewise, I tell you it is only necessary for me to convey my message to sincere hearts; people in palaces, false dignitaries, and those who wear purple garments cannot harbor it.”

“You know it will not be that way.”

“Woe to those who block my will!”

“And what is your will?”

“That the men who agree with me love as I have loved. That’s all.”

“You are right,” I suggested. “However, this has not stopped people from establishing new bureaucracies, laws, and headquarters. Nevertheless, many people in my world would want to ask you one question...”

“Go on,” the Galilean encouraged me.

“Can we reach god without going through the church?”

The Rabbi sighed. “Do you need the church to reveal your heart?”

My confusion was so extreme that my throat was blocked. Moreover, Jesus perceived it.

“Brother Jason, long before the tribe of Levi existed, long before man was capable of standing up by himself, my father sowed beauty and wisdom on Earth. Who came first god or this church?”

“Numerous priests in my world consider the church to be holy.”

“My father is holy. You will be holy the day you love.”

“Then, I beg your pardon for saying this—the church is superfluous.”

“Love does not need temples or legions. A man accepts good or evil in his own heart. I have only given him one command and you know what that is... The day my disciples make it known to all of humanity that my father exists, my mission is complete.”

“It is curious that your father is not in a hurry.”

The giant gazed at me complacently. “Truly, I say unto you, he knows it will end successfully. Man suffers from blindness, but I have come to open his eyes. Others have already discovered that it is more beneficial to live in love.”

“So, what about us? What if we do not eventually find this peace?”

“I have said I will vomit the tepid out of my mouth, but I don’t intend to destroy your brothers with malice or in haste. I allow every spirit to find the path. In the end, he will be your judge and defender.”

“Then all of this about the final judgment...”

“Why are you so concerned about the end when you don’t even know the beginning? I mentioned that a surprise awaits you on the other side.”

“I have the impression that you would be too liberal for the churches in my world.”

“God is very liberal, as I had, as I have said, his allowances include permission for you to make mistakes. Woe to those who claim to be saviors and respond to an error with an error and to an evil with an evil! Woe to those who monopolize god!”

“God...you always talk about god. Would you please explain to me who or what that is?”

The fire in his look coursed through me again. I doubt there was a wall, heart, or distance in existence that could resist a similar force.

“Can you explain to them where they came from and how? Can a man hold colors in his hands? Can a child keep the ocean in the fold of his tunic? Can the doctors of law change the progression of the stars? Who has the power to return the fragrance to a flower, which has been trampled by an ox? Do not ask me to talk about god: feel him. That is sufficient.”

“Am I correct if I say one feels him like anenergy?” I was not going to give up and Jesus knew it.

“You are doing very well.”

“And what is under this ‘energy’?”

“There isn’t any above and below,” the Nazarene cut in as he worked out the steps of my reckless thoughts. “Love, which is to say the father, is everything.”

“Why is love so important?”

“It is the sail of the ship.”

“Please allow me to insist, what is love?”

“Giving.”

“Giving, but what?”

“Giving anything from a look to your life.”

“What can we give to those who are distressed?”

“Anguish.”

“To who?”

“Give to the person who loves you.”

“And what if you don’t have anyone?”

The Teacher made a dismissive gesture. “That’s impossible. People you don’t even know can love you.”

“And what do I say to my enemies? Must I love them too?”

“Them above all...He who loves his enemies has already received his reward.”

The conversation continued until the early hours of the morning. Now I realize my skepticism toward the man had started to crack. Four hours later, Eliseo awakened me at daybreak. The day before, the Teacher had given the disciples precise orders that they were to leave for Jerusalem early. At about seven o’clock in the morning, which was two hours prior to the third hour, I reported to Simon the Leper’s house. Jesus and the twelve disciples gathered in the garden. This time the Rabbi’s instructions were much more concise: there was to be no parade and no public demonstration. With the exception of the Alpheus twins, the apostles had not recovered from their experiences the day before. They were still mute and withdrawn.

To be honest, no one knew Jesus’ intentions and he was not excessively explicit about them either. At that time, even going to the city was a box of surprises. The Sanhedrin continued spying and the Galilean’s closest friends did not know how they could conceal their destination.

We set out on the trail at eight o’clock in the morning. As always, Jesus walked in front. As we ascended the slope of Mount Olivet, he tried to draw out the disciples. How different this long walk was! The joy and enthusiasm of the previous Sunday had transformed into fear, dread, and extreme confusion. There was a common thought among these men: What should they do? Should they stay with the Teacher or renounce him and retire? Yet no one was brave enough to confront Jesus and reveal his concerns.

The group entered Jerusalem at around nine o’clock in the morning. Judging from the pedestrian traffic, the number of pilgrims present had grown considerably. Without losing any time, the Teacher went to the Temple.

The proximity of Passover kept the Gentile’s Esplanade at a full boil. The booths and stalls seemed much busier than they were on Sunday afternoon. Hundreds of Jews from all social classes were doing everything they could to make purchases or exchange their money in order to make the required offerings, pay the tribute into the sanctuary’s treasury, or simply arrange for the selection of a victim without blemish for the Passover dinner. Because of the abuses perpetrated by the priests, the common people had gradually ended up frequenting these “intermediaries” and buying birds and lambs from them. The servants at the Temple had become so avaricious and cunning that whenever an animal was purchased elsewhere, it was rejected for technical reasons. In other words, those who were in charge of the sacrifices and the inspection of each one of the sacrificial victims beforehand could reject a lamb or a pair of doves for the mere fact that they deemed the color of the animal unsuitable. This was a public embarrassment and what was worse, it necessitated the purchase of a new animal. In order to ensure the creatures’ health, the Hebrews went to this market and purchased a few animals, which were

“fully guaranteed”. As I pointed out previously, this sophistry was always accompanied by a surcharge, which was so obscene as to be ruinous for the poorest families.

To top it off, the “tax” or tribute each Hebrew was required to pay to the Temple, had been set in the common currency: the shekel—a coin the size of a dime but twice as thick. A month before Passover, the official “money changers” set up their tables in different cities in Palestine, to provide the pilgrims with the money they needed to transact such business. Needless to say, these “bankers” received a commission for each transaction which varied between five and fifteen percent of the total value of the exchange. If the monetary value of the exchange was very high, these usurers would collect a double commission. Finally, when the festival was imminent, the “money changers” made their way to Jerusalem where they put up their headquarters in the Gentile’s Courtyard. This business could report huge profits to the real owners of the livestock, the exchange tables, the multitude of supplies and ingredients used for the Passover sacrifice. These proprietors were none other than the priests and, in particular, Annas’ sons.

Jesus, as well as the rest of the city knew about this situation. Yet the power and the tyranny of these individuals were such that no one dared to raise their voice against this profanation of the House of God. It was in this atmosphere, surrounded by discussions, haggling, and the incessant comings and goings of hundreds of Hebrews, that the Nazarene prepared to address his words, as was his habit, to the numerous believers and followers who had been gathering next to the vendors’ and money changers’ stalls on the morning of April 3.

The Teacher started preaching, but soon his powerful voice was drowned out by two circumstances that were going to precipitate events. At one of the money changing tables, very close to the staircase where the Rabbi sat, a Jew from Alexandria began a heated argument with the person responsible for the exchange. The pilgrim justifiably protested the abusive commission, which presumably covered the currency exchange.

As the tone of this confrontation escalated, people swirled around the vociferous Hebrew. If this commotion was not enough, at that instant a herd of more than one hundred oxen burst into the atrium. They were being lead across the courtyard to the corrals located in the north wing next to the Sheep Gate. These animals, which were now the Temple’s property, were destined to be burned in the next sacrifice and consequently were normally kept in the stables adjacent to the Gentile’s courtyard. When Jesus saw these bellowing oxen, the increasingly extreme conduct of the “money changer”, the Jew, and their supporters, he and his audience chose to pause and wait. His disciples remained silent and withdrawn about fifteen or twenty paces away. Yet the violent situation, which was far from dying down, only increased.

The tight crowding made it a little less than impossible for the young shepherd to control the oxen that were scattering between the tables. Just then, while the Nazarene was waiting impassively, a third incident arrived to provide the final spark. One Galilean, who was in the crowd of Jews who wanted to hear Jesus, was an old friend of the Teacher. (Later I learned he had met the Rabbi during his stay in Iron.) A group of pilgrims from Judea began to harass this humble farmer. With pushes, shoves, and elbow jabs, these arrogant individuals jeered him for his credulity.

When the giant noticed this final scene, he removed his mantle, let it fall on the flight of stairs, and went after the shepherd. Once Jesus caught him, he snatched his corded whip to the astonishment of the disciples and everyone else. With an unprecedented confidence, the Galilean was rounding up the bulls, herding them out of the Temple with resounding shouts and powerful

lashes of the whip over the courtyard's tiled floor. The crowd was electrified as it watched the Teacher guiding the cattle. But that was not all.

As soon as he finished his "cleansing" operation, he silently opened a majestic path through the multitude by striding towards the pen with the whip in his left hand. The enclosure was situated beside the Gentile's Courtyard at the foot of Antonia's Fortress. This was new to me, so I ran after him. On reaching the stables, he opened all of the gates one after another and urged the oxen, goats, and sheep to leave with a coolness that left me speechless. Instantly, hundreds of animals erupted into the atrium. Utilizing the same skill and determination he had applied to the first herd in the Temple, Jesus steered the frightened animals in the direction of the "money changers" and brokers' sales booths. As expected, the stampede provoked panic among the Hebrews who knocked over innumerable stalls as they fled through the exit gate. For their part, the oxen generally demolished numerous vats of oil and salt.

A substantial group of pilgrims took advantage of the situation as a way of exacting their revenge: they emptied the few booths that remained standing. In a matter of minutes, the merchants had literally been swept away to the delight of thousands of Jews who hated their permanent desecration. Hence, when the Roman soldiers arrived, everything appeared quiet and calm.

Jesus of Nazareth, who had neither touched a single Hebrew with the whip (as I can faithfully attest to, since I stayed very close to the Teacher), nor destroyed any table, returned to the top of the staircase and addressed the crowd.

"Today you have witnessed what is written in the scriptures: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but it has been made into a den of thieves," he shouted.

My surprise reached its apogee, when a bevy of young Jews stood out from the crowd by applauding Jesus and singing hymns of gratitude for the Galilean's courage and audacity even before the Rabbi concluded with these words. This incident had nothing to do with what the Evangelists said in passing about how the Messiah looked like a furious individual who was capable of hitting and whipping people. As I mentioned before, Jesus had preached in the same Temple courtyard on many occasions and had never behaved in such a manner. He was perfectly aware of the trading and swindling which was happening every day in the Gentile's Courtyard, nonetheless he would have never used violence against such a condition. If he had initiated the livestock's stampede that Monday morning, it was, in my opinion, a consequence of a very concrete and untenable situation.

Obviously, the ones who could not be at fault were those in charge of the Temple. Once the priests knew about the incident, they rushed to the place where Jesus was located.

"Haven't you heard what is said about the sons of the Levites?" they asked him sternly.

However, Jesus answered, "Praise is perfected in the mouths of children and infants."

Then the youths intensified their singing and cheering, which forced the Pharisees to leave. From that moment, groups of pilgrims stationed themselves at the Temple's entrance gates to prevent the moneychangers and brokers from re-establishing their normal business operations. The youths had not even carried a single earthenware vessel across the courtyard.

Perhaps the saddest and most discouraging outcome of this event was the twelve disciples' attitudes. During the Teacher's passionate intervention, the group was a bit short of cowering in a corner without raising a hand to protect or assist Jesus. The Galilean's novel, surprising action had plunged them into total embarrassment.

Moreover, if Christ's disciples' confusion was remarkable, that of the Temple leaders, scribes, and Pharisees was no less so. This was the drop of water, which filled their patience to the brim. The Sanhedrin made the most of the fact that Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and Jesus' other friends were not present, by convening an emergency meeting to analyze the situation. They had to detain the imposter without delay. But how and where? The scribes and the rest of the priests realized the multitude supported the Galilean. Also, there was another factor they could not lose sight of: the presence of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. If they arrested Jesus during the daytime while thousands of foreigners and Jews who had arrived from all of the corners of Palestine were looking, his capture could incite a general revolt. This would absolutely provoke a violent repression by the Roman forces that were quartered in Antonia's Tower and in the temporary encampment in the city's northeastern zone near the Pool of Bethesda.

What could they do? For hours, the members of the Sanhedrin discussed the ideal formula for capturing Jesus. Ultimately, they did not reach an agreement. The only valid resolution was to appoint five groups of "experts"—especially scribes¹ and Pharisees—who would follow the Galilean's footsteps and attempt to confound Jesus and publically ridicule him in order to decimate his prestige and influence among the common people.

In accordance with this order, one of these groups opened a path to where Jesus was continuing his talk at approximately two o'clock in the afternoon. In their characteristic haughty and authoritative style, they questioned the Teacher, "With what authority do you do these things? Who has given you such authority?"

¹ The major difference between scribes and the rest of the priesthood—Pharisees, Levites, Temple leaders, etc. was based on knowledge. The scribes were seen as the repositories for science and initiation. In order to become a member of the so-called "association of scribes", the aspirant was required to study numerous subjects beginning in his youth. When the *talmid* or scholar has achieved a command of the traditional material and the *Halakha* (which is the collection of Jewish law from sections of rabbinical literature) to the point of being considered a person with the capacity (i.e. capable) of personally undertaking questions of religious law and criminal rights, then and only then was he designated as a "doctor without ordination" or *talmid chacham*. Later, when he is forty years old—being the canonical age for ordination—if he has the ambition to be a scribe, he can enter the "corporation" as a member with full rights or a *hakham*. From this moment, the new scribe has the authority to settle questions about religious laws or customs by himself, to be a judge in criminal proceedings, and to make decisions on civil judicial matters either as a member of a court of justice or as an individual. He has the right to be called "Rabbi." His decisions have the power to "bind" or to "loosen" all of the Jews in the whole world. For example, Nicodemus, who was one of Jesus' friends, was one of these prestigious scribes in whose path all of the children of Israel must stand. There was an exception for those who were professional artisans. Yet what gave them more than power and influence among their compatriots was the fact that they were the bearers of the "secret science", the esoteric tradition. One of the texts states: *Do not publically explain the laws about incest in front of three listeners, nor the history of the creation before two, not even the vision of the fiery chariot in front of one unless it is prudent and sensible to do so. If one considers four things more valuable than not to have come into the world, it is to know what is above (first), what is below (second), what was before (third), and in what will be next (fourth).* This is from the rabbinical writing *Hagigah* (II: 1 & 7). It is easy to recognize Jesus' audacity when, in many of his public sermons, he attacks the scribes by accusing them of having taken the keys of science for themselves and locking out men's access to the Kingdom of God. This was fatal. The scribes would never forgive such reprimand [Major's note].

They knew the Nazarene had not attended the required rabbinical schools. Furthermore, his teachings as well as the title “rabbi” which many people attributed to him were not strictly correct in respect to legal and judicial purity.

But Jesus, with his characteristically brilliant reflex, responded with another inquiry, “I would like you to ask me another question. If I answer it, it will also give you the answer to the question of who gave me the authority to do these works. Tell me, where was John’s baptism? Did John receive authority from heaven or from men?”

The scribes and Pharisees formed a huddle and began deliberating among themselves in low voices while Jesus and the crowd waited in silence. They had tried to corner the Galilean and now they found themselves in an embarrassing situation. At last, they turned to Jesus and replied, “We cannot answer the question in regard to the baptism of John. We do not know...”

The reason for their refusal was clear. If they had said “heaven”, Jesus could have responded by saying, “Then why didn’t you believe in him?” Indeed, in this case, the teacher could have added that his authority came from John. If on the contrary, the scribes had responded with “from men”, then the crowd—which considered John to be a prophet—could have turned against the priests. Once again, Christ’s strategy had been ingenious and categorical. The Rabbi fixed his gaze on them and rejoined, “Well, you even ask what authority I have to do these things...”

The Hebrews burst into raucous laughter at the impotence of Israel’s “top teachers”, who were red with rage and embarrassment.

“Since you have doubts about John’s mission, an enmity towards his teachings and the deeds of the Son of Man, give me your attention as I tell you a parable. There was a certain large and eminent landowner with two sons,” the Galilean began his relating his story. “Since he wanted them to help him manage his lands, he went to one of them and said, ‘Son, come work in my vineyard today.’ And without even thinking, the son answered his father, ‘I am not going to go.’ Yet he repented and went. When the father found his second son, he said, ‘Son, come work in my vineyard.’ And this son who was hypocritical and disloyal replied, ‘Yes, father I am going now.’ But when he left his father, he did not go.

“Allow me to ask, which of these sons actually followed his father’s will?”

The people answered as one man, “The first son.”

“Hence, I propose that the bartenders and sex workers, however they seem to refuse the call to repent, will see the error of their ways and enter the Kingdom of God before you, who have grand pretensions about serving the Father of Heaven. Yet you reject the father’s work. But this was not you, oh scribes and Pharisees who believe in John, but without the tabernacle and sinners. Neither do you believe in my teachings, but the common people listen to my words enthusiastically.”

This second public derision caused the scribes and Pharisees to turn around and go inside the sanctuary. To the crowd’s delight, the Teacher continued preaching peacefully. However, Joseph of Arimathea knew the priests’ choler had reached such a paroxysm that there was little chance the Levites would fail to surround Jesus and capture him that very morning. The entry of a

Sadducee² judge, who constituted a majority in the Sanhedrin, delayed Christ's enemies' plans, once more. These priests had pessimistically accommodated the dismantling of the "money changers" and "intermediaries" and so for the first time, both the scribes and Pharisees, supported the plans to eliminate Jesus. In an hour, a significant absolute majority decided to condemn the Rabbi from Galilee.

In the meantime, Jesus had told a second parable about a rich merchant who decided to send his own son to persuade the rebellious workers in his vineyard to pay the rent. Christ asked the audience what the owner of the vineyard should do with the evil tenants.

"He should destroy those miserable men," the crowd answered, "And rent his vineyard to honest farmers who give him some of the harvest every season."

Many of the people who were present understood the parable's meaning and loudly declared, "God forgive those who continue doing these things!"

However, some of the Pharisees did not give in to defeat and returned to the place where Jesus was preaching. When the Teacher saw them, he said, "You know they reject our brothers the prophets and how they have decided to reject the Son of Man.

After a few moments of silence, his look grew more intense and he added, "Have you never read the scripture about the stone that the builders rejected? When the people discovered it, they made it the corner stone." He warned them again. "If you continue to reject the evangelists, the Kingdom of God will be far from you and devoted to other people who wish to receive good news and to bring the fruits of the spirit. I tell you there is a mystery about this stone; those who fall on it will survive even if they are broken into pieces. But those whom the cornerstone falls on will be left as dust and their ashes will be scattered into the four winds."

On this occasion, the scribes and the leaders did not even try to respond. Therefore, the Teacher proceeded to relate a third parable about a wedding banquet. At its conclusion, Jesus stood up and prepared to dismiss the crowd. At that instant, one of the believers raised his voice and queried, "But Rabbi, how do we know these things? Can you give us a sign so we will know you are the Son of God?" he asked further and then he waited quietly.

The Pharisees sharpened their ears. Just when they thought the imposter had fallen into his own trap, the Galilean pointed his left finger at his own chest and said, "Destroy the temple and I will raise it in three days," in a resounding voice.

Jesus indicated that he had finished his sermon and invited his disciples to follow him as he descended the stairs. The multitude, which was immersed in copious discussions, started to disperse. Evidently, from what I overheard—they had not comprehended the true meaning of Christ's final lapidary sentence.

¹In these times the Sanhedrin were divided into two large groups: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The latter group formed an organization that primarily consisted of the noble laity and priests, the city's elders or notables, and the head priests. In those days, the high priest Joseph ben Caiaphas was a Sadducee. His "theology" was different from that of the Pharisees. He strictly followed the text of the Torah especially the sections with prescriptions pertaining to culture and the priesthood. His opposition to the Pharisees and his *Halakha* or oral tradition was total and fierce. In addition, they stipulated their own penal code, which was extremely severe. Of course, there were many scribes who "practiced" the Sadducee's doctrine [Major's note].

“It took nearly fifty years to construct this Temple,” they said to one another, “And yet he claims that if it is destroyed, he will raise it in three days?”

Of course, the apostles did not grasp the Rabbi’s meaning either. Only later, long after his resurrection, did it become a light in their hearts. At about four o’clock in the afternoon, the group left Jerusalem again and set out for Bethany.

During our ascent of the western slope of the Mount of Olives, which was a shorter route to Lazarus’ village, Jesus gave Andrew, Thomas, and Phillip instructions for tomorrow, which would be Tuesday. The disciples were to pitch camp near the Holy City. This meant the Nazarene intended to establish his normal quarters (which until now had been in Bethany) on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

But why? How could we know what activities the Teacher was referring to on Tuesday and Wednesday, when we scarcely knew what destiny had reserved for us on those days? Logically we had not anticipated Jesus’ unexpected decision in our working itinerary, since none of the evangelical, canonical, or apocryphal texts mentions this encampment. This was going to hasten my return to the module, which the Trojan Horse Project had scheduled for dusk on Tuesday April 4. A few hours later, precisely at nightfall on the aforementioned Tuesday, in view of what had happened, I began to apprehend why the Rabbi from Galilee had given this order...

For the second time, as we walked to Bethany, I had the opportunity to confirm how nearly all of the twelve men who were Jesus’ confidants had understood neither his message nor his intention. Their comments and above all their silence reflected a profound confusion. The Teacher’s magnificent act on Monday morning, wherein he had wrecked the moneychangers’ and the intermediaries’ commercial sacrilege of the Temple, had restored their hope in a powerful Jesus, who was capable of establishing “an Earthly and political kingdom” in Israel. But when the afternoon arrived, the rejection of his teachings by the Jewish priests caused them to plunge into uncertainty again. Those men would do something.

In spite of their limited cultural level, their permanent contact with the daily tense reality and Jesus of Nazareth’s warnings about his impending demise had made them intuit a catastrophe. Seized by doubts and fears, the disciples headed for their respective resting places, even though, as I would see evidenced tomorrow morning—very few of them managed to sleep.

So on that night of April 3 in the year 30, after I gave Lazarus and his family a temporary farewell, I set out for the *cradle* in order to initiate the second phase of the exploration. Without a doubt, this would be the most tragic and thrilling enterprise attempted by any man.

UNTITLED II

When I started my ascent of Mount Olivet's eastern face, the darkness was complete. I had already warned Eliseo about my impending return to the module due to the Galilean's change of plans. I was tempted to use a torch in order to precede more safety along the trail that wound through the olive trees. However, an inherent feeling of prudence caused me to desist.

The echo from the micro transmitter imbedded in the clasp on my mantle was arriving clearly from the *cradle*. This reassured me. At that moment, my objective was to reach the highest peak of this mountain of olives. It was located to the right of the trail. Once I found the stony clearing where the module was parked, Eliseo would take charge of guiding me via the auditory connection.

An hour earlier, when we were returning to Bethany, I had strayed behind and tied a small white linen cloth that I normally used to dry off sweat, to one of the branches of an olive tree just at the pinnacle of Mount Olivet. The rest of the Hebrews usually kept such a cloth tied around their right wrists. I had not crossed the path of a single walker; this was just as I had expected, so I breathed a sigh of relief. As soon as I identified the cloth waving smoothly in the wind, I quickened my pace.

After I removed it from the wild olive tree, I left the trail and entered the brush to the north of it. Far away to my left, I sighted the flickering yellow lights above Jerusalem. At intervals, a half-moon surged between the compact bands of clouds. Its light expedited my movement toward the ship considerably. In a few minutes, I was surprised by the clearing. I found the module perched on a level rocky promontory. Through our permanent connection, Eliseo had been monitoring my path and correcting my inevitable deviations from the course via the transmission on the radar screen. As I penetrated the module's security zone, which was about 150 meters from the point of contact, my partner announced that he would partially disconnect the impressive infrared shield in order to make the *cradle*'s supporting legs visible.

Suddenly, in the midst of the darkness, four large tubes appeared like bluish ghosts stuck in the rocks and pointing to the immense sky. Simultaneously, the hydraulic system lowered an aluminum ladder with a smooth puffing sound. I immediately stepped between the *cradle*'s landing gear and climbed inside the module. I suppose if someone had seen me during that time, they would have seen me ascend a ladder that apparently lead to nowhere, and then gradually disappear--first my head, then my shoulders and arms vanish, followed by the rest of my torso, stomach, etc. The observer's fright would have been substantial. Maybe they would have believed they had seen a divine vision.

My reunion with Eliseo was especially emotional and intense. Once I was inside the *cradle*, my copilot shielded the magnetic levitation system. Next, we confirmed that all was calm around the ship. Then we prepared to review and execute the second phase of the operation. My entry into the module was recorded at 20:05. This is significant because it was nine hours before my incorporation into Jesus' group, which the Trojan Horse Project had anticipated would occur at 06:30 on Tuesday April 14, which was tomorrow.

I washed up and changed my clothes, but not my shoes. Eliseo tried to familiarize me with what we called, "Moses' staff". It was the only instrument that was authorized to leave the *cradle* and it was going to play a vital role in my next exploration, especially during the

Nazarene's arrest on the night of Thursday April 6. Obviously on a 'journey' of this nature, General Curtiss' team had planned—at least at the times of maximum tension—to film the major events on the nights known as Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Resurrection Sunday. The Trojan Horse Project was also interested in filming a minute-by-minute comprehensive account of the tortures the Nazarene suffered as well as his hours on the cross. This monitoring would be performed from two points of view, first from my own personal testimony, and second by sensitive technical equipment, which would film and take measurements at the same time from a strictly clinical perspective.

Of course, these delicate operations could not be performed openly, since this would have violated the fundamental principles of the project. Hence, it was not feasible for me to carry a movie camera or complex surveillance equipment to continuously measure Jesus of Nazareth's vital signs. Naturally, it was impossible to implant cables or electronic devices in the Teacher from Galilee's body that would allow us to monitor his bodily functions, blood pressure, cardiac response, and etcetera. So the Trojan Horse Project had designed and built a complex system that was carefully camouflaged into what we called "Moses' staff".

This ingenious device, which I will gradually describe in detail, consisted of a simple crook of *abies pinsapo* 180 meters long and three centimeters in diameter. Its top was shaped into an arch.¹ To any observer who was unaware of our intentions, it would not arouse any more interest than would be given to a common walking stick that was regularly used by travelers and pilgrims.

Yet the most delicate equipment was installed in its interior. At 160 meters from the base of the staff, there were four channels for simultaneous filming. The objective was divided into the shape of a cross so I could shoot whatever happened within 360° of my surroundings. Each of the four apertures for filming measured 15 millimeters in diameter and had been concealed by being set in the center of a "ring" three centimeters wide which was made of a half-silvered glass that only permitted vision from the inside to the outside. Our technicians beautifully created this clamp into a shape that appeared to be a simple band of black paint over the white wood. It was reinforced by and decorated with two rows of copper nails, which held it securely. These wide-head nails were constructed in accordance with the ancient metalworking techniques that Nelson Glueck discovered in the Aqaba Valley, south of the Dead Sea and in Ezion-Geber, King Solomon's legendary seaport in the Red Sea. In order to avoid hypothetical problems, General Curtiss' team had followed the rule from the Sixth Order of the *Mishnah* or the Judaic oral tradition. The Sixth Order, which is dedicated to rules about purity and impurity, states that a walking stick in particular can avoid impurity "if it has been adorned with three rows of nails". One of these nails that was a more intense green color than the rest and rose slightly above the staff's surface could be manually pressed in to activate the filming process. Pressing the "nail", a second time would return it to its initial position and interrupt the recording.

¹ The top or curved handle of "Moses' staff" had a shape which the Trojan Horse project had meticulously researched. It was based on the results from one of my missions where I had to play the role of an "augury" or divinity. These "astrologers" were identified by their *lituus*, which was a small rod with the top part "curled up" or doubled over to form a diminishing spiral or a curved handle. It was just like the one we had seen in a famous bas-relief in a museum in Florence, Italy. As a matter of fact, I specifically chose fir wood for the construction of "Moses' staff" for purely sentimental reasons: legend says this was the type of wood that was used to build the Trojan Horse that the Greek army placed in front of the Gates of Troy [Major's note].

On this occasion of the “grand journey”, the Trojan Horse project omitted the objective lenses, which are generally used in video cameras by adjusting the aperture of the movie camera in a revolutionary system which, I am sure will be required in technical photography someday. Given the extreme miniaturization of our equipment, it would have been very difficult to change the camera’s objective lens to alter the focal plane. Through a highly complex technique, the glass lens was replaced by what we called a “gaseous lens”. This way the lens was able to transform into a wide angle, telephoto, close-up, etc. lens without changing objectives.¹

As I mentioned before, this soft lens device would be very useful. The ability to instantly change from, say, a wide angle to a telephoto lens would allow me to film extremely important details throughout the intense drama on Thursday and Friday, especially during the long hours of the crucifixion. Although I prefer to discuss it later, the process of filming was intimately linked to another system of medical “exploration”, namely the infrared emission from “Moses’ staff” through a mechanism housed in the upper crook, about 1.70 meters from the base of the staff.

¹ Although I will not dwell on the legion of technical components that formed this novel “gaseous lens” system, I do wish to mention some of their general features. Perhaps these can serve as tips or clues for researchers and professionals in the world of photography, since I fear this magnificent procedure will not be revealed to the world immediately. Its key or foundation is based on the phenomenon of light refraction. Everyone in the world knows that when a ray of light passes from one transparent medium to another medium with a different characteristic or density, it undergoes a change of direction. The entire theory of geometric optics consists of the analysis of refraction through lenses or reflection from various types surfaces or mirrors. In other words, engineers seek to integrate the visual image of any luminous object with the refraction of rays of light through a medium whose objective profile and chemical composition has been carefully defined and analyzed. This medium, which is called a lens still has a rigid structure. However, the phenomenon of refraction is also produced in an elastic medium such as a gas. In short, gaseous lenses operate on the same principle, which is similar to part of the eye’s mechanism in which a translucent lens is not rigid, but elastic. Very well, our cameras replace this rigid glass or semi-elastic gelatinous medium by a gaseous medium with a variable refringence. Let us discuss another example. Consider a container full of air that is heated from the bottom and refrigerated at the top. The bottom layer will be less dense than the top layer. In this case, due to the thermal expansion of the gas, a ray of light will undergo successive refractions that bend it upwards. If the process is reversed, the ray will bend downward. By applying these principles, the Trojan Horse Project had attained very accurate temperature control of various points in a solid, liquid, and gaseous or transition material. This was achieved by emitting two beams of ultra short waves, which emptied into the temperature gradient to a specific point “P” in the gaseous mass. This is to say, they successfully heated a small region of the gas in this area. Through this procedure, they could heat the entire container, but leave the interior of the gas cold so that it would adopt a lenticular shape that, in time, would be manipulated in thickness and optical configuration. The light that crossed this previously “worked” cold gas, would continue in a direction defined by the universal laws of optics. This was the key to substituting natural gaseous lenses for traditional glass lenses once and for all. These revolutionary lenses were created inside a very thin, transparent cylinder filled with nitrogen gas. A range of perfectly distributed high frequency radiators (1200 in total) warmed various points in the gas to different temperatures at will. This enabled the gas to attain a simple lenticular meniscus with luminosity f:32, which was equivalent to a complex system such as a telephoto lens or a wide angle lens of 180°. These cameras do not have a diaphragm at their disposal to vary the “optical” luminosity. Hence, the brightness of the “optics” will vary. The selenium film carries an electrostatic charge, which fixes an electrical image instead of a chemical one. The picture was formed by superimposing five transparent sheets whose sensitivity is calibrated by fixing many images of different wavelengths. In addition, a second camera used xenon gas for a new and complicated optical imaging process that instantly created a sort of reflective prism. Our gas lens cameras were fitted with a tiny nuclear computer which formed the device’s “brain”. This microcomputer also supplied the titanium memory for running the operating system for all of the parts, the programming for several kinds of optical systems in the gas cylinder, and all of the physical factors which controlled the image’s intensity and brightness as well as the focal distance of the objective for the corresponding deep field focus, chromatic filtering, visual field angle, etc. [Major’s note].

The filming equipment as well as the infrared and ultrasound emissions were maintained by the aforementioned nuclear computer, which was strategically enclosed in the bottom of the staff. Its complexity was such that, in addition to its automatic control of the filming, it stored the movies (it was capable of storing 150 hours of footage), regulated the emission, reception, and processing of the ultrasonic and infrared waves, “translated” data into images and sounds, supplied the ultra frequency generators with data, etc.. Its titanium memory¹ included the capacity to track the movement and turbulence of each one of the points of the four gaseous movie cameras so that the corrections from them maintained perfect optical stability.

¹ It is possible many people will ask how one can make a nuclear microcomputer of such small dimensions that it fit inside a fir wood walking stick thirty millimeters in diameter. Although I am not authorized to completely describe it, I will attempt to outline some of its essential characteristics. Generally, the voltage amplifiers or power devices fundamental to most computers are based upon the properties of cathode emission in a vacuum that is controlled with the help of electrons. This is the case with diodes and solid-state transistors made from silicon or germanium. Yet, these circuits do not amplify the energy. Indeed, the exit potential is always less than the entrance potential with yields less than unity. Just amplifying the voltage at the expense of the energy generates an energetic auxiliary front in the form of a load or alternating current rectifier. In contrast, the components in the Trojan Horse Project's computers (i.e. nuclear amplifiers) have a different framework. In the first place, they are not based on electrons—nor the vacuum, nor the solid crystalline state, but on the nucleic state. At the input, a feeble energy from neutrons or protons striking against few atoms produces a colossal amount of energy from nuclear fission. Therefore, the yield is much greater than unity. At the amplifier's output, we obtain thermal energy, which is not electricity. However, this heat is converted into electrical energy in a subsequent process. Since these components are purely atomic, it is not trillions of atoms which enter the game, but only a few small units—thus the degree of miniaturization is extraordinary. It enables one to store complex circuits in greatly reduced volumes [Major's note].

TUESDAY APRIL 4

At 5:42 am on Tuesday April 4, I alighted from the module at dawn and set out on the path back to Bethany. The sky had recovered its lovely celestial blue color, but the temperature was slightly lower than it had been on the previous days, yet it was still bearable. The *cradle* measured a temperature of 11°C when I bid Eliseo farewell.

In addition to allowing me to have a short but deep rest and a complete bath, that brief period in the module had enabled me to satisfy a small whim. For the first five days of the exploration, I had intensely longed for breakfast the “old fashioned way,” according to the custom in the United States. In this very special case, perhaps one would have to say “in the future way.” So under my partner’s amused gaze, I prepared some bacon, scrambled eggs, buttered toast, and two generous cups of steaming hot coffee.

Quite willingly I picked up my new inseparable “companion”—“Moses’ staff” — and placed a tiny microphone, the “rattlesnake” contact lenses, two emeralds, a length of colored cord, and a “letter” from a supposed friend in Thessalonica into the oilskin bag. As we will see, all of these were of great importance in the development of my mission...

As I approached Bethany by the same path I had taken the night before, before I returned to the *cradle*, I was possessed by a growing curiosity. What would fate bring on Tuesday and Wednesday—days that were barely mentioned in the gospels? What would Jesus of Nazareth do in the hours preceding his arrest? These anxious feeling made me quicken my pace.

When I was a stone’s throw from the road, which lead from Jerusalem to Jericho by crossing through Bethany, a dense thicket caught my attention. It contained beautiful racemes of the sultan variety of sedges that are highly prized by Jewish women. I knew how the women loved to adorn their hair with dainty clusters of these fragrant flowers. A type of refreshing liqueur, with a taste similar to *horchata* or a spiced rice drink, is concocted from an extract of the plant’s small ovoid tubers that are smaller than hazelnuts. Happy with my discovery, I broke off a flourishing branch and resumed my trek.

Once I arrived at the village, the familiar sound of grinding alerted me that the inhabitants of Bethany were devoting time to their daily chores and presumably, the Teacher from Galilee, who was an early riser, had already embarked on his journey. There was no time to lose. As soon as I entered Lazarus’ home, his family greeted me with lively demonstrations of enthusiasm and joy and offered me a traditional kiss on the cheek.

Martha seemed especially pleased and more nervous about my visit than anyone else did. Her confusion reached its limit when I unexpectedly placed the juniper raceme in her hands. Her deep black eyes held mine. For an instant, in one of those strange flashes, she left the group at full speed in order to take refuge in one of the large rooms off the main courtyard. Mary and Lazarus could not contain their laughter.

However, my thoughts focused on Jesus. I immediately asked Lazarus about the Teacher’s whereabouts. Since he felt it was his duty to satisfy my interest in the Galilean, Lazarus fulfilled my request by offering to escort me to the Leper’s mansion. Judging from the sun’s position, it must have been seven o’clock in the morning. After crossing the garden, I rejoined the

group of disciples who were in conversation with the Rabbi at the foot of the same staircase where I had held my first conversation with him.

I prudently stayed at the rear of the well-attended reunion and observed that, besides his twelve male confidantes, along with twelve females who were also chosen by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, there were twenty or twenty-five disciples who were all very good friends of the Galilean, together with the owner of the house: the venerable Simon. From the tone of his voice, which was more serious than usual, I understood that this reunion contained an uncommon sentiment. I was not mistaken. Jesus was saying good-bye before his friends' astonished eyes. At that instant, I surreptitiously pressed the copper nail that activated the filming. No one noticed the motion. Nevertheless—and I believe I must mention this in honor of the truth—at the moment I started filming, the giant, who had his back to me as he was talking to a cluster of women, suddenly turned his head and stared first at me and then at the walking stick I held in my right hand. A wave of blood rose up from my stomach. In a matter of seconds, he finished by giving me an outline of a wide smile, which I believe I returned, although I am not very certain... For a moment, I thought everything was going to collapse.

The apostles and the disciples, who followed everything and every one of the Teacher's actions, associated that glance and smile with my presence. They did not grant it any more significance than a warm welcome to a gentile who had come to demonstrate an open and sincere interest in the Rabbi's doctrine.

Jesus immediately turned to his twelve closest friends and addressed a few warm parting words to each one of them. He began with Andrew, the real person in charge of the group of apostles. In one of his favorite gestures, he put his hands on Peter's brother's shoulders as he said, "Do not be discouraged by the events that are about to happen. Keep a strong hand on your brothers and take care that they do not see you discouraged."

Next, he spoke to Peter. "Don't place your trust in the arms of the flesh, nor in arms of metal. Base your persona on the spiritual foundations of the eternal rocks."

These sentences perplexed me. I almost unconsciously associated them with the ones in Matthew chapter sixteen, where the text reads, "Welcome Simon bar Jonas..., and I proclaim that you are now called Peter and upon this stone I will build my church..." after Peter's confession about the Teacher's divine origin.

In my study of the canonical gospels during my preparation for operation Trojan Horse, I discovered information was repeated in different passages and this confused me. Some of the Nazarene's speeches or events related to his birth or public life were only mentioned by one of the evangelists, while the other three did not mention them. This was the case with the aforementioned paragraph in Saint Matthew that supported the belief among Catholics that Jesus of Nazareth wanted to build a church just like the one we are familiar with today. Thus my doubt was born in that very moment.

How was it possible that Mark, Luke, and John did not equally record this declaration, which was such a decisive part of Jesus? Could the case be that the Leader from Galilee never pronounced these words about Peter and the Church? Could Peter's so-called "confession" be a deficit of information on the part of the evangelist? Or was I finding myself confronted by a manipulation which occurred long after Christ's death, when the Rabbi's teachings had started to be "channeled" through many academic and bureaucratic structures that demanded justification at the "highest level" for their own existence.

The events I was going to have the opportunity to witness on the afternoon and evening of Tuesday April 2 confirmed my suspicions about the apostles' abominable reception for many of the things Jesus did and especially for what he said. Although I would never deny the possibility that the Galilean could have uttered these words about Peter and his Church, when I listen to the personal farewell the Teacher delivered to Peter in Simon the Leper's garden, my doubt about a likely confusion on the part of Saint Matthew grew appreciably.

When Peter heard these emotional words, he made a reflexive motion to hide the hilt of his sword which was concealed between his tunic and its sash with his mantle. But Jesus pretended he had not seen this gesture and moved to stand in front of Stephan to whom he said, "Do not be dismayed by external appearances. Stay firm in your faith and soon you will know the reality that you believe in."

He continued with Bartholomew. In the same gentle tone, he affirmed. "Do not judge by appearances. Live by your faith when everything seems to fade away. I know the loyalty you have for your mission as an ambassador of the kingdom."

He dismissed the imperturbable Phillip, the "pragmatic" man of the group with these words "Don't be frightened by the events which are going to take place. Remain calm even when you cannot see the path. Be loyal to your vow of consecration."

Immediately afterwards, he spoke to Matthew in this manner, "Remember the grace you received from the Kingdom. Don't allow anyone to cheat you out of your eternal reward. Just as you have resisted your natural mortal inclination, you will remain diligent."

This was his farewell to Thomas: "It is not important how difficult the test is: now you must walk according to your faith and not by sight. Don't doubt that I can finish the work I started."

His next words to Thomas, the great skeptic were especially prophetic "Do not allow those who can't understand you to crush you," he said to the twins. "Thirst for the affection of your hearts and do not place your faith in great men or in the people's transient attitudes. Stay with your brothers."

When he arrived in front of Simon the Zealot, who was the most political disciple, he continued. "You can be crushed by confusion Simon, but your spirit will raise you above all who go against you. That which you have not already learned from me, my spirit will teach you. Search for the true spiritual realities and abandon your attraction for illusory shadows and material goods."

John was the penultimate apostle. The Teacher held John's hands between his own and said, "Be gentle. Also, love your enemies. Be tolerant. And remember that I believe in you."

With tears in his eyes, John restrained Jesus' hands while he exclaimed in a whisper, "But Lord, where are you going?"

Judging by the expressions on their faces, I am sure everyone had formed the same question. Yet their spirits were so battered and confused that no one except the sincere and valiant John dared to express this aloud.

Finally, the Teacher approached lanky Judas Iscariot. From the outset, this man's complex, tormented personality held a special attraction for me. I tried to never let him out of my sight as much as possible. I already foresee that the reason that pushed him to betray Jesus was not monetary, as the evangelists have insinuated. For a man like him the respect of others and personal vainglory were esteemed much higher than greed...

"Judas," the Galilean said, "I love you and I pray that you will love your brothers. Do not tire of doing good. I advise you to be careful on the slippery ways of flattery and the venomous darts of ridicule."

Evidently, Jesus knew the traitor's character very well. Once the teacher had completed his farewells, he had a certain shade of sadness on his face. He took Lazarus by the arm and they left the group as they went deeper into the garden. Only after his death, a few scant hours prior to my return to the module, did Martha confess what had been the subject of this private conversation between Jesus of Nazareth and his brother.

Jesus promptly recovered his habitual good humor. Then he ordered his disciples to set up camp that morning on Mount Olivet and asked Peter, John, and Stephan to go with him to Jerusalem. My decision did not involve any doubt. Accompanied by a small group of disciples, I followed the steps of these five men.

As usual, the Nazarene covered the steep eastern slope of the Mount of Olives with his enviable physique in just over half an hour. At the time we finally reached the peak, Jesus and the apostles, who were far from stopping, had already left, and were on the hill below moving toward of the Cedron's dry stream. Contrary to what I imagined, the Teacher did not seem in a hurry to enter the Holy City. He lingered at the foot of the eastern slope of Mount Olivet in an esplanade crammed with dozens of stores. The majority of these were occupied by pilgrims who were on their way from Galilee as well as wool merchants and vendors of sacrificial animals.

I noticed some of the families knew the Galilean and begged him to sit down with them. The Teacher enthusiastically accepted, caressed the children, and expressed his delight when one of the women gave him an earthenware bowl of fresh goat's milk. Another woman quickly placed a wooden tray containing a handful of dates and a pale yellow cake (according to one of my companions was "fig bread"¹) on the straw mat where the Rabbi sat.

The Nazarene smiled as he waved away the numerous flies that tried to land on the milk. He lifted the contained to his mouth with both of his hands and slowly drank with gusto. Shortly after saying good-bye to his hosts, he made two other visits.

Around the third hour (9 o'clock in the morning), the group continued along the road to Jerusalem. It was then that Peter and James, who spend several days embroiled in a controversy on the Rabbi's teachings about the forgiveness of sins, decided resolve their doubts. Peter spoke first.

¹ In a subsequent connection with Eliseo, the main computer confirmed that figs together with dates were the Jewish town's major sources of sugar. They generally dried them and used them to make cakes. This "fig bread" also had a medicinal use as a cure for ulcers. *Santa Claus* provided ample information expounding that the fig cake served to Jesus was made from a variety called "sycamore" which were frequently found in Palestine in the first century. This very low quality food is punctured while it is still on the tree so that it ripens faster [Major's note].

“Rabbi, James and I do not agree on your teachings on the redemption of sin. James claims you teach that the Father will forgive us even before we ask him. I maintain that repentance and confession must occur before the pardon.”

Somewhat surprised by the question, Jesus paused in front of the Temple’s eastern wall and looked intently at the four men. He responded, “My brothers, you err in your opinions because you do not comprehend the nature of the close and loving relationship between the creature and the Creator, between man and god. You have not attained knowledge of the sympathetic understanding that wise fathers have for their immature children who are sometimes wrong. It is truly doubtful that a loving and intelligent father would not forgive a normal child. An understanding of the loving relationship effectively prevents the type of disputes that will later need alterations and require the child to repent and his father to forgive.

“I say a part of each parent lives in the child. Moreover, the parent enjoys prior knowledge and superior comprehension in all matters related to his child. Very well, when the children are small, the heavenly Father possesses infinite divine sympathy and loving understanding. Forgiveness is divine as well as inevitable. God’s infinite comprehension is inherent and inalienable, and he has perfect knowledge of everything concerning the child’s bad choices and erroneous judgments. Divine justice is so eternally just that it inevitably includes full pardon.

“When a wise man understands other human beings’ inner impulses, he will love them. And when you love your brother, you will have already forgiven him. The ability to understand human nature and forgive its apparent mistakes is divine. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if parents are wise, then this must be the way they love and understand their children; this includes a father’s forgiveness when a misunderstanding has momentarily separated them.

“Due to the child’s feelings of immaturity and lack of understanding of the profound relationship with the parent, the child will frequently feel a sense of separation from the parent. But a real parent will never be conscious of this separation. Sin is an experience of the creature’s conscience; it is not a part of god’s consciousness.

“Your inability and lack of desire to forgive others is the measure of your immaturity and the reason for the failures to attain love. You maintain rancor and feed revenge in direct proportion to your ignorance of the inner nature and real desires of your children and your neighbors. Love is the result of the divine and inherent necessity of life. It is based upon understanding and nourished by generous service and perfect knowledge.”

Jesus’ four friends kept quiet. It is possible that James and John understood part of the Teacher’s explanations, even though the brother fishermen did not. Peter nervously scratched his bald tanned head as he walked behind the Galilean, submerged in a vast number of deep thoughts.

At approximately 9:30 am, Christ and his disciples passed through the East Gate in the Temple wall and proceeded to the staircase in the Gentile’s courtyard, which was the place where he usually held his sermons and discussions. The moneychangers and vendors of lambs and other Passover paraphernalia had returned and reinstalled their tables and booths using the first light of dawn.

Everything seemed peaceful. None of the brokers made the tiniest gesture of disapproval when they saw the Rabbi from Galilee and a small group of his followers enter. For his part, Jesus

gave a perfect account of how local laws had enabled this commercial sacrilege to return. But, he did not pay any attention to them, just as he had on many previous occasions. The Teacher's attitude confirmed my conviction that what happened yesterday morning had basically been an extreme situation.

Many of Jerusalem's residents as well as the pilgrims who were causing the population of the Holy City and the surrounding areas to swell day by day, waited impatiently for the Rabbi from Galilee to appear. The majority of them were motivated by a morbid curiosity to witness an incident like the perilous scene chronicled on Monday morning and to monitor the Sanhedrin's actions. It was an open secret that Caiaphas and the rest of the Jewish high consul had decided to arrest and execute Jesus. But would they dare to do it in public?

The Rabbi kept current with these intrigues and the threats, which hovered over his head through some of the elders and Pharisees who had resigned from the Sanhedrin. Plenty of Hebrews secretly applauded the Nazarene's valor and the fact that he did not display fear or nervousness, but advanced serenely and majestically through the Levites, above all in plain view of the high priests.

In the midst of this spectacle, without further preamble, Jesus commenced his sermon. He had scarcely begun when he was interrupted by a group of students from the scribes' school who were very prominent in the crowd.

"Rabbi, we know for fact that you are a teacher and we know you proclaim the paths to truth and you only serve god, therefore you fear no man. Lord, we are mere students and we would like to know the truth about a matter that concerns us. Is it just for us to give tribute to Caesar? Should we or should we not do it?"

At that instant one of Nicodemus' servants, who professed Jesus' doctrine at that time—whispered that we must remember that this impertinent interruption formed a part of the plan designed by Sanhedrin during their ominous session yesterday. The Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees had, in effect, united their votes in principle to form "specialized" groups that would attempt to publically ridicule and discredit the Galilean.

The Nazarene broke the typical silence endemic to moments of high tension. He spoke in an ironic tone as if he knew perfectly well that these young men with the false ignorance were representatives from the Herodians¹. He also questioned them, "Why do you come here to provoke me?"

Jesus immediately extended his left hand towards the students. "Show me the money for the tribute and I will answer you," he ordered in a firm voice.

The representative for the group of students handed him a silver denarius². After the Teacher examined both sides of the coin, he replied, "What image and inscription appears on this money?"

¹ This group was in favor of Herod's dynasty. As a part of their mission, they reported any movements or attacks—including verbal attacks—against Caesar, to the Roman authority [Major's note].

² The silver *denarius* was the legal currency at that time. *Santa Claus* indicated that one *denarius* was more or less equivalent to a Roman legionnaire's pay for two days. In Caesar's time, the annual stipend for a soldier in the Roman legion was 150 *denarii*. Augustus added a new bonus, which brought the total to 225 silver *denarii* or 5400 *ases*. This quantity was confirmed by Tacitus during Tiberius time in the *Annals*

The teenagers looked amazed, and then they responded, taking it for granted that the Rabbi definitely knew their answer.

“Caesar’s”

“Then give unto Caesar, what is Caesar’s; to god, what is god’s; and to me, what is mine,” he answered as he returned the money.

The multitude marveled at Jesus cleverness and wisdom. They burst into applause while the aspiring scribes and their accomplices—the Herodians, left in embarrassment.

As Jesus contemplated the denarius, I had instinctively removed a similar coin from my bag and examined it carefully. The image of Caesar seated in a chair appeared in profile on one side of the coin. One could read the following inscription around him: *Pontiff Maxim*. The obverse contained an effigy of Tiberius crowned with a laurel wreath accompanied by the words: *Ave Augustus Ti Caesar Divi*¹.

This new public trap had been very well planned. The entire world knew that the denarius was the ultimate tribute, but the Jewish nation had to pay an exorbitant amount to Rome as a symbol of its submission and servitude. If the Teacher had disagreed with the tribute, the members of the Sanhedrin would have quickly sought an audience with the Roman governor and accused Jesus of sedition. If, on the contrary, he had revealed that he supported following the imperial order, then the majority of the Hebrews would have felt their patriotic pride wounded, except for the Sadducees who paid their tribute with gusto.

It was precisely this group, who arrived a few minutes after the previous incident to continue the strategy devised by the Sanhedrin. They walked toward Jesus, who intended to resume his sermon—and set a second trap.

“Teacher,” began the spokesman for the group, “Moses said if a married man dies without leaving sons, then his brother must take his wife and sow seeds for his dead brother. Now the following case occurs: a certain man, who has six brothers, dies without leaving descendants. The next brother takes his wife, but he soon dies without leaving sons. The second brother does the same thing and also dies without leaving offspring. This continues to happen until all six brothers have taken the wife and all of them have died without leaving children. Then, after all of the brothers are gone, the wife dies. We want to ask you the following question: When they are resurrected whose wife will the woman be?”

As Jesus’ disciples listened to the Sadducees’ discourse, several of them started to shake their heads as a sign of disapproval. According to how it was explained to me, the population considered the Jewish laws regarding this particular issue to be “dead letters”. Although this case is very concrete, it was very difficult to produce in reality. Only some associations of Pharisees—the purest ones—still considered and practiced the so-called levirate marriage².

(I:17) : *denis in diem assibus animan el corps aestimari*. While, centurions charged 2,500 *denarii* per year, the *primi ordines* received 5,000 *denarii* [Major’s note].

¹ This is “Supreme Pontiff” and “Save Divine Tiberius Caesar Augusto!” respectively. The inscriptions appear abbreviated. Actually, they must say: *Pontiflex Maximus* and *Ave Augustus Tiberius Caesar Divinus* [Major’s note].

² That night the central computer gave me extensive and comprehensive information about this peculiar type of matrimony. The Hebrew oral tradition—as collected in the Third Order of the *Mishnah* which is

Even though the Rabbi was aware of the Sadducees' lack of sincerity, he agreed to answer.

"Everyone errs by constructing such questions since they do not know the scriptures or the power of the living god. You know the children in the world can marry and be given in matrimony, yet you don't seem to understand that those who are worthy of the future world, after the resurrection of the just, are neither married nor given in marriage," he said to them.

"Those who experience the resurrection from the dead are more like angels in heaven who never die. The resurrected are eternal children of god. They are children of light. Your father Moses also understood this. When he was before the burning bush, he heard the Father say, 'I am the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac, and the god of Jacob.' And so, like Moses, I declare my father is not a god of the dead but of the living. In him all of you are born again and possess mortal existence."

The Sadducees withdrew; they were prey to a great confusion. Meanwhile, their secular enemies, the Pharisees, managed to shout out, "True, true, true Teacher! You have answered the unbelievers well."

Again, I as well as the multitude, was left amazed by the giant's sagacity and quick mental reflexes. Jesus knew this sect only accepted the validity of the five texts called the Books of Moses. Therefore, he made a precise reference to Moses in his reply that disarmed the Sadducees. Yet, from my point of view, the Pharisees who applauded the Teacher's words did not understand the depth of the Nazarene's message when he alluded to "those who experience the resurrection from the dead" in his resounding voice. The "holy" or "separate" as they were commonly called, believed in the resurrection as a raising of the physical body. But Jesus statements did not refer to this type of resurrection...

The Teacher seemed resigned to temporarily suspend his sermon. He waited silently for a new question. In a few moments, it actually arrived from the lips of someone from the same group of Pharisees who had feigned such warm praise for the Rabbi. One of them pointed to Jesus and presented a subject that touched the crowd again.

"Teacher," he said, "I am a lawyer and I would like to ask you which, in your opinion, is the most important commandment."

devoted to *Yevamot* (about in-laws), and corresponds to the laws contained in Deuteronomy [25:5-10]—establishes that when two brothers set up house, one next to the other and one of them dies without leaving sons, the wife of the deceased cannot marry a stranger. Rather 'her brother-in-law must go to her and take her as his wife.' She will deliver a first born for the dead brother so 'his name will not disappear from Israel'. But if the brother-in-law refused to accept his sister-in-law as his wife, she could go to the gate with the elders and say to them, 'My brother-in-law refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel. He does not want to fulfill his obligation to his brother-in-law by taking me as a wife.' The town's elders will come and have a discussion about him. If he persists in his refusal, his sister-in-law can approach him in the elder's presence, take off her shoe, spit in his face, and say, 'I do this to the man who does not support his brother's house.' In addition, in Israel, his house will be called the "shoeless" house. This marriage, which is mandatory, is called *yibbum* or levirate from levir, which means the husband's brother. When the sister-in-law is left with heirs, this marriage is not allowed. After the "shoe ceremony", the sister-in-law is free to marry anyone. Over the centuries, this mandate was gradually lost. By Jesus' time, it was rarely followed. In the majority of cases, it was locked into being a purely symbolic or a legal process [Major's note].

Without sparing even a second in reflection the giant raised his powerful voice even louder and replied “There is no greater commandment than the one commandment and this is the greatest of them all. It is this, listen oh Israel, the lord our god, the lord is one. I want you to love with all of your heart and with all of your soul, with all of your mind and with all of your strength. This is the first and the greatest commandment. The second one is like the first. In reality it follows directly from it and it is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. No other commandments are greater than these. These form the entire foundation of the law and the prophets.”

A man of the law, who was dismayed by the wisdom of Jesus reply, bowed and openly praised the Rabbi. “Truly Teacher, you have spoken well. God bless you. You are one and there is no one else after you. Love with all of your heart, understanding, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself is the first and the greatest commandment. We agree that this great commandment is worth much more than all of the offerings and sacrifices that we burn.”

In contrast to his reaction to the previous retort, the Nazarene felt satisfied and formed a before the stupefied Pharisees.

“My friend, I have good reason to believe that you are not far from the Kingdom of God...”

Jesus was not mistaken. That same night, this Pharisee went secretly to the campsite at Gethsemane where Jesus instructed him and he asked to be baptized. The conclusion of this series of dialectical defeats dissuaded the remaining groups of scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees, which began to retire furtively. When the Galilean observed that there were no further questions, he stood up before the venomous high priests disappeared and skewered them with an interrogation.

“Since don’t have any more questions for me, I would like to pose one to you. What do you think about the Liberator? I say, whose son is he?”

The Pharisees and their accomplices stopped as if they were electrified. A murmur ran around that area of the esplanade. The members of the Temple deliberated for several minutes. Finally, one of the scribes pointed to the tefillin, which contained the law, that he wore tied to his right arm and replied, “The messiah is the son of David.”

But, the Nazarene was not content with this answer. He knew there was a bitter controversy about whether he was or was not a son of David. It even existed among his own followers. So he clinched it.

“If the Liberator is the son of David, why is that a psalm attributed to the same David, which discusses the spirit say, ‘Lord, I say to my Lord: sit on my right side until you have made your enemies into a footstool for your feet’? If David addresses him as Lord, how can he be his son?”

The Pharisees and the Temple leaders were left so confused that they dared not answer. Towards the fifth hour, which was approximately eleven o’clock in the morning, Jesus concluded his visit to the Temple, as it was time to eat. He lead his disciples to the Triple Gate in the direct of Joseph of Arimathea’s house in the lower district.

On discovering that I was left behind, I prepared myself not to alter the group's intimacy as much as possible. Andrew turned back and invited me to share the second meal of the day with them. By then Jesus and the rest of the disciples had already passed by the money changers' and merchants' tables and disappeared through the colossal gate in the Temple's southern wall.

I was on the point of accepting, of course, when a tumult from the most eastern face of the Sanctuary caused us to turn around and look back. Between rending screams, a woman was being practically dragged up the flight of stairs that lead to the Corinthian Gate. A squad of the Temple's police (the Levites), who were probably assigned to the Women's Courtyard, pulled her across the esplanade where we were to Solomon's Gate or, more specifically, to the East Gate. Two of the Levites, who were the "guards of the day," were holding a Hebrew woman up by her armpits while a third guard endured her hard, violent movements and made her stay up on her feet. Behind them, half-hidden in the cluster of curious spectators, one of the guards on duty at the Temple marched along with several high priests.

The crowd, which had been dispersed among the vendor's stalls, instantly ran towards the squad hurling shouts of 'Adulteress! Adulteress!' as if this scene was common and even celebrated by the mob. I gave Andrew an inquiring glance. With a grave expression, the manager of the group, who regretted this somber coincidence, summarized the lamentable spectacle with the following phrase: These are the "bitter waters."

I instantly remembered one of my investigations of the biblical text. In particular, Numbers [5:11-13]¹ specifies a procedure to follow for a woman suspected of adultery. When the husband believes his wife has been unfaithful, he will bring her to the priest and force her to confess. If she refuses to admit her guilt, then the disgraced woman must pass a test or a type of "judgment by god" with the "bitter waters." The priest prepares a special concoction composed of a prayer from the Bible, soil from the Tabernacle, and an ink in which he writes the ritual curses, that is subsequently diluted with water and, as a part of the religious ceremony, given as a portion to the suspect to drink. The Jewish belief teaches that if the woman is actually guilty, the

¹ The cited biblical passage states: Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and tell them: If a woman fornicates, is unfaithful, or sleeps with another in sex involving semen, without being seen by her husband or any witnesses and she has not been discovered in bed and if the husband is seized by the spirit of jealousy and is jealous of her, whether or not she is actually spoiled, bring her to the priest and offer an oblation of a tenth of an *efa* of barley flour for her. Without pouring the oil over her or lighting incense, since it will put the jealousy to rest and put the memory to rest which puts sin to rest. The priest will approach her and before Yahweh, he will take the holy water in an earthenware vessel and add a handful of soil from the floor of the Tabernacle to the water. Then the priest will bring the woman before Yahweh, uncover her head, and his hands will put the memory and the jealousy to rest as he holds the cursed bitter water in his hands. He will say to her, 'If you have not slept with anyone, and if you have not been led astray, contaminated, or unfaithful to your husband, you will be unharmed by the cursed bitter waters; but if you strayed and fornicated or were unfaithful to your husband, spoiled yourself and slept with another (here the priest will curse with the oath of execration by saying): 'May Yahweh curse you and cast you out from the center of your village and continue by swelling your thighs and your belly. May this cursed water enter your bowels and make your stomach swell and putrefy your muscles.' The woman will answer: 'Amen, amen.' Then the priest will write these curses on a leaf and dissolve them in "bitter water" and he will make the woman drink the bitter cursed water. Next, he will take the woman's hand and put the jealousy to rest, shake it before Yahweh, and bring her to the altar. Then he will take a handful of the offering for the memory and burn it on the altar. After the woman drinks the water, he must do the following. Once he has given her the water to drink; if she has been contaminated or been unfaithful to her husband, then the cursed water will make her belly swell, dry out her thighs, and there place a curse in the midst of the town. If, on the contrary, she is pure and unspoiled, she will be left unharmed and she will be fertile...So the husband will be free of fault and the woman will bear his sin [Major's note].

mysterious liquid will attack her bowels and kill her. On the contrary, if she is innocent, the “bitter waters” will not alter her body¹.

For a rational mind, this test leaves much to be desired in respect to its potential. But to tell the truth, the thing which aroused my curiosity was the “formula” for the “brew.” What did it contain? It was a unique opportunity and I entreated Andrew to accompany me. I wanted to be present at the execution of the sentence and if possible take a sample of the ink used to prepare the “bitter waters”. Andrew half-understood my apparently morbid wish and reluctantly consented to grant me a few minutes.

I walked under the East Gate’s stone arch and opened a passage between the people who surrounded the squad. Several Levites had formed a circle or security cordon about ten meters in diameter. In its center, the woman who was always held upright by the Temple police stood sobbing. She had been stripped of all of her adornments and dressed in a black tunic. My companion explained that this was the final phase of a process which had started yesterday, on Monday morning. (The judges of the Greater or Lesser Sanhedrin had only assembled on Mondays and Thursdays each week in order to settle pending cases.) This case of supposed adultery had been brought before the Lesser Sanhedrin, which consisted of twenty-three judges.

At the request of her husband, the suspect—a young woman, who was no more than twenty years old—had been carried away on Monday April 3 and brought before the justice tribunal where she was interrogated and terrorized with expressions such as: ‘My daughter, much sin can be attributed to wine, too much laughter, too much youth, too many evil neighbors; in the name of god, what has been written with holiness cannot be erased with water.’

Yet, judging from what happened, the unhappy woman had declared herself innocent and the Lesser Sanhedrin decided she must submit to the test of the “bitter waters.” When I asked Andrew about this Hebrew woman’s fate had she pleaded guilty, the apostle insinuated that her did not know but it would have been worse. If a Jewish woman says, “I am impure” before the tribunal, she is obliged to agree to renounce her dowry and proceed with the consummation of the divorce petition. As Andrew stated correctly, in these circumstances the wife is left in the most absolute misery, she has to abandon her home and her children are despised for life. The laws establish the right of divorce solely and exclusively for the man².

This is open to constant abuses, caprices, and injustices. If the husband wants, he can leave with the dowry that the woman contributed to the marriage and simultaneously regain his status as a bachelor. All he has to do is accuse his spouse of infidelity. There are two outcomes: the woman dies from the “bitter waters” or she is charged with the sin of the aforementioned consequences.

¹ *Santa Claus*, our onboard computer, completed my information about the “bitter waters” by adding that a similar procedure existed in the Code of Hammurabi. There, if a woman happened to be suspected of adultery, she was thrown into the Euphrates River. If she got out alive, she was considered innocent. If she perished, her guilt was obviously manifest [Major’s note].

² The Jewish woman only has the right to request a divorce if her husband performs one of three professions: collector of dog excrement (garbage), copper foundry worker, or tanner. This list was contained in the rabbinical writing *Ketubot* (VII: 10.8). And it must only be on account of the bad odor produced by the said activities. The law also stipulates that a wife can seek a divorce, if after thirteen years her husband forces her to take vows, abuses her dignity, or if he suffers from leprosy or polyposis [Major’s note].

Just as I suspected, it was extremely rare for a victim to survive after ingesting this beverage. Finally, after the disgraced woman had declared she was “pure”, she was driven in through the Nicanor Gate—as tradition dictated—to the narrow field at the base of the Temple’s eastern wall. This was the same location where they brought people at the end of the ceremonies for the purification of lepers and women in labor.

One of the priests who stood out in the crowd, walked with determined steps to the young woman, stood in front of her, and grabbed her tunic at the level of her stomach with his left hand. With a fierce yank, he tore her dress, leaving her small white breasts exposed. The wife’s screams practically drowned out the roar emitted by the excited crowd as they contemplated her beautiful bosom. The same priest immediately moved behind the woman and began to loosen her long black hair.

Andrew was nervous and disgusted. He acted as if he was going to leave. In an attempt to gain time and take advantage of my friend’s logical desire to avoid this very deplorable scene, I took out my oilcloth bag and put two denarii in his hand. Andrew gazed at me without understanding.

“I want to ask you a favor again,” I said. “It is important for me to obtain a sample of the ink that is used to write the curse...”

The Galilean remained perplexed. I anticipated his thoughts by adding, “Trust me. You know I can’t enter the sanctuary and try to buy it in person. A small quantity will be enough; perhaps a tenth of a *log*¹ will be sufficient. I continued to stare at Andrew as I endeavored to transmit a modicum of confidence. Fortune smiled on me again: the disciple shrugged his shoulders, assented, and implored me not to move from that place.

While Andrew re-entered the Temple enclosure, I rejoined the course of events. Now the priest who had ripped the woman’s tunic was deliberating with the rest of the members of the Temple. From time to time, they turned towards the unfortunate woman and engaged her in new, incendiary polemics. One of them left the huddle and walked a few steps until he stood a palm’s length from the suspected adulterer. Without being perturbed by the woman’s tears, he bent his head slightly as he inspected her small dark nipples. After a short while, he returned to the center of the gathering and initiated a fresh, harsher argument.

Finally, after reaching an agreement, another one of the priests took an Egyptian belt made of knotted rope and made his way to the young woman. He covered her torso by wrapping the material over her breasts to form a tunic that would not fall down. One of the Hebrews who stood with the priests and who turned out to be the husband followed an order from the Temple guards and the head of the squad of Levites. He advanced to the middle of the circle and set a straw basket filled with 2-3 kilograms of barley flour at his wife’s feet². Then he departed with the same coldness. For a moment, I believed the plaintiff was going to put the small basket in the hands of the condemned, but one of the Levites restrained the woman and gestured to him so the husband ended by placing it on the ground. When I returned to the module on Sunday morning, the computer clarified this ending. The Biblical tradition specifies that the husband’s offering of

¹ A *log* was a unit of measure for liquids and dry goods it is approximately equivalent to a half a liter [Major’s note].

² An *ephah* was a Jewish measure of volume that was equivalent to 72 *logs*. In this case, the Bible estimates that one must offer a tenth of an *ephah* that is 7.2 *logs* or approximately 600 grams (3.600 kilograms) [Major’s note].

the *ephah* of barley flour must be placed in the victim's hands. Then the priest places his hands beneath the woman's hands and shakes the ritual container. He continues by going to the altar, taking another handful of barley, and burning it. The rest of the barley flour is allotted to the Temple priests for food. The unhappy woman's fierce resistance meant that she could not be released from the police's firm control. Therefore, in this instance it was advisable for the priest to omit that part of the ritual.

Suddenly, the Jews in the area closest to the wall opened a path for another priest who was closely escorted by six Levites. A murmur rose from the crowd when it was discovered he was carrying something in his hands. Judging from what little effort the Hebrew exerted, the object covered in white linen was lightweight. At once, I imagined this could be the vessel that contained the bitter waters. Fortunately, I did not have to wait very long for my doubts to be dispelled. The bodyguard who had just arrived moved to stand beside the woman and the police who held her formed a second security cordon.

The priest pulled back the linen to reveal a small earthenware bowl filled with reddish clay to the gaze of all those present. The container had a capacity of approximately one liter. As soon as the wife saw it, she suffered a new attack of desperation. She convulsed violently and uttered shrieks which made numerous doves and pigeons that were perched on the Temple's dome and towers fly away. Gradually, a total silence, which was broken only by the prisoner's, howls fell over the place. Now the priest who carried the earthenware vessel raised his voice and commanded the woman to declare her innocence or guilt for the last time. The crowd waited expectantly.

Between moans that sounded progressively more subdued, the Jewish woman chose to pronounce only two words, "I'm pure."

A member of the Temple, who seemed to be in an incomprehensible hurry, turned to one of the Levites and whispered something into his ear. The officer left his post immediately and rejoined his three colleagues who were restraining the young woman. He positioned himself behind the victim, clasped her thick mass of hair, and pulled it down so she was forced to lift her face towards the sky. Her screams intensified. The squad steadied their feet on the uneven field as they increased their hold on the woman's arms and legs with newfound strength. Meanwhile, two other police situated themselves barely a few centimeters away from her, one on each side. It was as if this operation had been extensively studied and practiced. Once the Levite flanked her left side, he sealed off the adulterer's nose with the fingers on his left hand. His right hand hovered at the height of her face waiting for the time when the danger of asphyxiation would force her to open her mouth.

After sobs and poorly controlled snorts, the woman finally inhaled air. The police officer's hands plunged into her mouth as if they were spring-loaded and forcibly separated her upper and lower jaws. In a tenth of a second, the priest, who held the bowl, took one step forward and poured its contents into the victim's mouth.

In spite of the six police who immobilized her, the woman managed to tilt her head slightly so that part of the blackish liquid spilled down her checks, neck, and tunic. Once the brew was drained, the priest stepped back while the Levites who stood beside her held her nose and mouth closed. No matter how he pulled her hair and the three men pinned down her arms and legs, she remained in the same position.

Despite my training for this mission, a wave of indignation moved through me from head to foot. However, in accordance with the Trojan Horse Project's mandate, I could not do anything other than impassively witness this tragic ordeal. Now I realize this was a decisive assimilation test for my mission. It would help me to observe the no less dramatic hours on Good Friday with total coldness...

Five minutes had not passed before the woman began to suffer a series of spasms. Her knees doubled, but the Levites still tried to hold her upright. (After I analyzed the ink, I understood why the police's attitude was based on a single well-studied objective: to prevent the condemned woman from falling on the ground and contracting her abdomen. For then she would vomit the bitter waters, thereby annulling their effects.) The young wife was slowly losing her strength. Her face acquired a yellow tint and her eyes, which were opened very wide and stared at the infinite blue sky above Jerusalem, began to bulge as the main arteries in her neck swelled alarmingly.

Evidently, the poison was having the desired effect. The priests knew this, so when these symptoms appeared, they ordered the squad to release the woman. As soon as they released her, she collapsed on the ground. Meanwhile, dozens of curious people silently filed by to pass through the walls again or go downhill to the Cedron.

It was Andrew's voice calling to me from under the arch of the East Gate, which brought me out of my sad contemplation of the unconscious or perhaps lifeless body that was surrounded by the Temple police. My friend must have immediately noticed my distress. He took my arm and lead me across the Gentile's Courtyard in the direction of the lower district. Once we were far away from the Temple, the disciple removed a small bottle about 17 centimeters tall, equipped with a single handle. It was concealed in his clothes. Its narrow circular opening was perfectly sealed with a cloth stopper. Without any further explanation, he placed the red earthenware jar in my hands along with one of the two denarii I had given him. Andrew did not ask me a single question. I was doubly grateful for his efficiency and discretion.

Many days later when it was possible to analyze the contents of the vessel, my suspicions were confirmed. The ink in question contained four main ingredients: indigo, potassium carbonate, anhydrous arsenic acid, and quicklime, all diluted in common water. The key fact was that according to the Old Testament, the ink must be dissolved in water. This greatly reduced the choice among the array of inks presumably used in Israel in the first century. This crucial requirement for water soluble ink was no less decisive in causing the aforementioned human reactions and almost inevitably leads us to the so-called "blue ink."

In our research, we also discovered that one of the ingredients—the anhydrous arsenic acid—was not actually one of the original ingredients nor was it a necessary component of the ink. Sulfurous arsenic was present with indigo and quicklime appeared with the sulfurous arsenic, but never with the anhydrous arsenic. How could this be? The explanation is simple: the Israelites used a variety called yellow arsenic, which naturally occurs as a mass composed of yellowish semi-transparent sheets. It is odorless, tasteless, insoluble in water, and volatile in fire¹. Arsenic

¹ This sulfur is different from the red realgar sulfur, which is found in abundance in Bohemia and is often encountered in Persia. This is why the Israelites had the best access to the yellow one. However, both of these combined characteristics seemed to make them soluble in alkaline solutions. Even so, the yellow variety, which also contains anhydrous arsenic acid, is much more toxic than the red one. It was also more prevalent in the commerce of that era as Theophrastus, who lived three hundred years before Christ, also knew about it [Major's note].

from yellow sulfur is non-toxic. This explains why it could be handled without causing any problems. Yet its interior harbors a very active poison: pure anhydrous arsenic acid, which has very strong effects.

Since this poison is insoluble in water, the Jews made it dissolve thanks to the other substances that appear in the formula for the blue ink: potassium carbonate and quicklime, which are both powerfully alkaline¹. The priest in charge of preparing the bitter waters probably boiled the four main ingredients—indigo, potassium carbonate, yellow arsenic sulfide, and quicklime until they completely dissolved. Next, he filtered the resulting liquid and added a small portion of powdered Arabic gum, which our experts detected in the blue ink in exact proportion to the amount of quicklime. This produced a concoction that was doubly useful as an ink and a poison. As for the eponymous bitter flavor, which gives the potion its name, it could have been produced by the presence of potassium chloride, since it has a sharp bitter flavor². Given the “sacred” character of this ink, it is most logical that it was not prepared until shortly before its use.

The Third Order of the Mishnah, which is dedicated to women, describes how the priest must fill a new earthenware bottle one quarter to one half-full, which is about a *log*, with water from the trough. In other words, fill it with between 125 and 250 milliliters of common water. It continues: *Enter the sanctuary and walk to the right where a square cubit (about 45 square centimeters) has been measured out on a marble table, with a ring around it. After lifting it, take the ashes that have fallen under it and place them in the clay bowl so they are visible in the water. Just as it is written: there are ashes on the floor of the sanctuary and the priest shall put them in the water.* Finally, the priest uses the “ink” to write the ritual incantation. As mentioned in the book of Numbers (5:23), Yahweh orders him to write in a “book”, in other words, on a scroll. Neither gum, vitriol, nor any other substance that settles could be used. Naturally, if the accused’s punishment was to drink the poison contained in the ink, it must perfectly dissolve in water.

After these verifications, a series of very intense and fascinating, if harmful doubts were left floating in the spirits of the members of the Trojan Horse Project. First of all, if the Jews left Egypt in the year 1290 B.C., how was it possible for the Hebrew community to know about anhydrous arsenic acid and its ill-fated effect on the human organism, if the first news about it started to spread throughout the world in the ninth century of our era³. Moreover, if they were not the discoverers or the creators of a similar formula, who made it? There can only be one immediate conclusion: Yahweh. But, if we accept this hypothesis, who would Yahweh be able to transmit such advanced, precise chemical formulas to in those times. Above all, why would a being defined as god, establish such an unjust and horrendous procedure for detecting a person’s guilt?

According to the experts in toxicology and forensic medicine, the woman who ingested a substance with the properties cited for the bitter waters, would suffer symptoms of gastroenteritis. In fact, a dosage of 120 milligrams of this anhydrous acid could kill a woman. The typical signs

¹ In particular, potassium carbonate is extremely alkaline when it is in contact with water. It also has a strong caustic nature or corrosiveness that can aid the major disintegration of both the sheets of arsenic sulfide and the ink into the water [Major’s note].

² In contrast to popular belief, anhydrous arsenic acid does not have a bitter taste, but a slightly sweet one [Major’s note].

³ Although the Greeks and the Romans knew about their native arsenic sulfide, it seems there was no knowledge of anhydrous arsenic acid—at least in Europe—prior to the time of Jabir in the ninth century. Paracelsus mentioned this same metal, but its properties and nature were not well understood until 1732 by the famous alchemist Brand [Major’s note].

are present within a few minutes: intense thirst, vomiting, bowel movements, cramps, and an alteration in facial features, which causes death by asphyxiation.

The opinion of the other poison experts was that the bitter waters could contain another potent toxic element such as an extract from the desert viper *echis carinatus* in place of the anhydrous arsenic acid. In this case, for the venom to have such a lethal effect, the priests introduce quicklime, which shreds and burns the mucus membranes, into the brew to activate the viper's venom, as the venom is innocuous when it is taken orally¹.

When the bitter waters were prepared with this venom, there was always the possibility for a miracle. If the venom produced by the saw-scaled viper or *echis carinatus*, which is very common in the deserts in the Sinai Peninsula, were omitted, then the supposed adulterer would not suffer in any way. Naturally, this trick, which was also taught by the suspect Yahweh, was open to numerous manipulations by the ignorant multitude and—of course—the possibility of blackmail on the part of those responsible for preparing the bitter waters. This issue is worthy of an in depth study.

With certain haste, which I suppose was justifiable; Andrew guided me through the narrow alleys in the lower section of Jerusalem until we arrived at a house located between the Synagogue of the Freedmen and the Pool of Shiloh. Its façade was entirely made of carved stones with an ostentatious Star of David on a circular shield carved in a stone lintel. I could read the word 'Jerusalem,' which was formed by five Hebrew letters so that each one was positioned between the tips of the no less famous star in a beautiful high relief that was worn by the passage of time.

Due to Joseph of Arimathea's wealth and aristocratic lineage (his family, like Jesus' family, were descendants of the mythical King David), he was an eminent Decurion, which was a type of advisory council to the Sanhedrin and a person of great prestige in the Holy City. His graceful willingness to do good deeds that was undoubtedly a product of his travels throughout Greece and the Roman Empire, had swept him towards Jesus of Nazareth's teachings from the very beginning. Although he had been born in the village of Arimathea (present day Rantis, northeast of Lod), he spend his infancy and youth almost entirely in Jerusalem. According to what I was told over lunch, his house had been built by his ancestors, exactly on the remains of the ancient "City of David" on Ophel Hill.

His considerable fortune was chiefly amassed through the construction business and enabled him to furnish this mansion with the finest luxuries. An obvious Hellenistic influence was noticeable in all of his decorations. His profession, which was the aspect that attracted me to him the most, had permitted him to have close contact with the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate. He was very active when he arrived in Judaea after his appointment by the Roman Emperor Tiberius. One of his first projects was the construction of an aqueduct 300 stadia long (nearly 50 kilometers)². Well, Joseph of Arimathea was one of the main suppliers of mortar and lead.

¹ Professor E. Kochva from the Department of Zoology at the University of Tel Aviv in Israel has also expressed his agreement with this last hypothesis. If the mucous membranes that protect the internal walls of both intestines are torn, the bitter waters can become an active poison [Major's note].

² In fact, in the book *The Jewish Wars*, Josephus Flavius maintains that this aqueduct was one of Pilate's most serious mistakes. Without the least political tact, the procurator demanded to use the Jewish treasury called the Corbon to carry the water. This provoked a revolt, but Pilate reacted with force by ordering his soldiers to beat the protestors with clubs and sticks, which produced a large death toll. Recent archeological discoveries have demonstrated that the aqueduct in question went to the Mountain of the Franks near Bethlehem where the fortress Herodium sits [Major's note].

Andrew knew the house well and conducted me directly to a spacious courtyard with an open pit. There I found the Teacher with his disciples, thirty Greeks being the same ones who had accosted him for the first time on Sunday afternoon and who, it seems, had reconsidered and sought him out again. Joseph of Arimathea was also there with the nineteen members of the Sanhedrin who had submitted their resignations because of the supreme tribunal's serious irregularities towards Jesus. The food mainly consisted of game and legumes. The third course had already been passed when I took a seat at the far end of the table.

The Nazarene appeared to be addressing the foreigners from Alexandra, Rome, and Athens in a weary tone, "I know my time is approaching and I am troubled by it. I perceive that my people are determined to scorn the Kingdom, but I am glad to receive these Gentiles and truth seekers who come here today to ask about the path of light.

"However," Jesus continued, "My heart mourns for my people and my soul is disturbed by what is before me..."

The Teacher paused and the guests looked at each other. They were baffled by the obsessive idea that the Rabbi kept stating day after day. When I entered the courtyard, I leaned my walking stick against one of the white marble walls after pressing the nail, which started the filming mechanism. To tell the truth, during the time I stayed in Joseph of Arimathea's house, my attention was so focused on my walking stick, that I was not distracted by the innumerable servants who entered with trays of delicious food for the host and his guests.

"What can I say, when I look ahead and I can see what is going to happen to me?" Jesus added.

Peter fixed his blue eyes on his brother Andrew, but judging from the expression on his face in the end neither of them understood.

"Should I say, 'Spare me from this horrendous hour'? No! I came into the world for this purpose, which includes this hour. Very well, I say and I pray for you to join me Father, glorified be your name. Your wish will be fulfilled."

When the food was finished, some of the Greeks and disciples rose and asked the Teacher if he would explain the significance of the time and place of the "horrendous hour" more clearly. But Jesus completely avoided answering. As I went to fetch my staff, my attention was called to a splendid crystal vase locked up next to a modest collection of small oval and spherical stones in a glass display cabinet. Joseph must have observed my interest in these pieces. He came over and revealed that it was a valuable diatrete vase covered with silver filigree. It had been discovered in Germany and was a singular example of the difficult art of glasswork that is so skillfully practiced by the Romans.

The stones, which were about five centimeters in diameter, formed a part of another unique collection. These were antique slingshot projectiles made of flint and limestone. According to Joseph's ancestors, they were used by seven hundred special troops who were the youngest left-handers capable of shooting a horse without missing a shot just exactly as cited in the book of Judges [20:16].

"It is very likely that David used a stone similar to these in his fight against Goliath." Joseph insinuated.

This brief encounter with the venerable Joseph who must have been around seventy years old—was very useful for the plans the Trojan Horse Project had prepared for me. One of my goals to achieve prior to dusk on Thursday was to initiate contact with Jerusalem's Roman prefect. When I exposed my desire to hold an interview with Pontius Pilate, Joseph was reluctant. I tried to win his confidence by describing how I was an astrologer in the service of Tiberius and how in order to make the most of my short visit to Israel; it would be of supreme interest to Pilate if he could learn about the notable grave events indicated by the stars. Just as I had hoped, Joseph expressed a keen curiosity and promised to schedule an interview for the day after tomorrow—Wednesday—provided that he could be present. Delighted, I assented.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus said farewell to Joseph of Arimathea and walked up the cobblestoned streets to the Temple's south wall. Once he was on the road, he announced to his friends that this was going to be his last public sermon. But his confidantes made no comment. Actually, their hearts were sunk in a deep confusion. How was it that the Teacher, who had always escaped from the Sanhedrin's claws, was going to allow himself to be captured by them?

Once again, in the Gentile's Courtyard, the rabbi settled into his usual place on the flight of stairs surrounding the shrine. He began to speak in an extremely affectionate tone.

"Throughout the time I was with you, going back and forth throughout the land, proclaiming the Father's love for the children of men, many have seen the light and have entered the Kingdom of Heaven through faith. In connection with this teaching and prophecy, the father has done marvelous things including raising the dead. Many of the sick and afflicted have been cured because they believed. Yet all of this promulgation of the truth and treatment of the sick has not served to open the eyes of those who refuse to see the light and those who are determined to reject the Kingdom's gospels. I as well as all of my disciples have done our best to live in peace with our brothers, to reasonably fulfill the mandates of the Laws of Moses and the traditions of Israel. We have persistently sought peace, but this nation's leaders will not have it. In rejecting god's truth and the light of heaven, they place themselves on the side of error and darkness. One cannot have peace and light in the midst of darkness, life in death, truth in error. Many of you have dared to believe in my teachings and have joined the joyful and liberating consciousness of being children of god. You will be my witnesses that I have offered the same filiation with god to all of Israel, even to the men who now seek my destruction. But I say more: my father would receive the blind teachers and the hypocritical leaders now, if they will turn their faces to him and accept his compassion..."

Jesus had been pointing to the different groups of scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees as they gradually joined the hundreds of Jews who wanted to listen to the Rabbi from Galilee. Some of the disciples, especially Peter and Andrew, paled when they heard the Teacher's bold attacks.

"Even now it is not too late for these people to receive the word of heaven and welcome the Son of Man," Jesus continued.

One member of the Sanhedrin was so visibly upset when he heard these sentences that he dragged the rest of his group away from the courtyard. Jesus was perfectly aware of this behavior and raised his voice as he assailed them.

"My father agreed to have mercy for these people. Generation after generation, we have sent our prophets to teach and warn them. And generation after generation they have killed the

ones we sent. Now your willful high priests and obstinate leaders are doing the same. Just as Herod killed John, you are also preparing to destroy the Son of Man. There is still a chance for the Jews to turn their faces to my father and seek salvation: the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob keeps his hands out to you. But once you have overflowed the cup of your impertinence, this nation will be abandoned by its own council and will rapidly proceed to an inglorious end.”

The Hebrew's strong sense of patriotism was evidently moved by Jesus' words. The multitude listened as they sat on the flagstone paving in the Gentile's Courtyard, shifting restlessly between murmurs of disapproval. Yet the Nazarene did not alter his course. This man was truly brave.

“These people had been called to be the light and to show the world the spiritual glory of a race knowledgeable about god. Up until today, you have turned aside the fulfillment of your divine privileges and your leaders are on the point of committing the supreme madness of all time.”

Jesus paused briefly as he kept the audience in suspense.

“I say they are on the verge of refusing god's greatest gift in all of history to all men: the revelation of his love. Truly, truly, I tell you, once you reject this revelation, the Kingdom of heaven will be delivered to other people. In the name of the father who sent me, I warn you that you are one step from losing our place in the world as supporters of the eternal truth and as custodians of divine law. Right now, I am offering you your last chance to enter like children with sincere faith into the security of salvation in the Kingdom of Heaven. My father has worked a long time for your salvation and I have descended to live among you and personally show you the way. Many Jews and Samaritans, and even gentiles have believed in the gospel of the Kingdom. And you, who should have been the first to accept the light of heaven, have refused the revelation of the truth of god as it was revealed in man and by a man elevated to a god. This afternoon, my apostles stand here before you in silence. Soon you will hear their voices clamoring for salvation. Now my disciples and believers in the gospel of the Kingdom, I ask you to witness that I once more offer Israel and its leaders freedom and salvation.

“I warn you in every way that these scribes and Pharisees still sit down in Moses' chair and nevertheless, until the most powerful rulers of the kingdom of men banishes and destroys them, I order you to cooperate with these elders of Israel. I do not ask you to join them in their plans to destroy the Son of Man, but in whatever other matters relate to peace in Israel. In these affairs, do what they order and observe the essence of the laws, but do not follow the example of their evil deeds. Remember this is their sin: they say what is good, but they do not do it. You know very well how these leaders make you carry heavy loads while they do not lift a finger to help you. They have oppressed you with ceremonies and enslaved you with traditions. Moreover, these self-centered priests delight in doing good works in order to be seen by men. They make their tefillin huge and widen the trim on their official robes. They request the places of honor at the banquets and ask for the first seats in the synagogues. They covet salutes and praises in the marketplace and want to be called Rabbi by all men. And even as they search everywhere for honors, they secretly take possession of widows' property and benefit from the Temple's holy services. These hypocrites make long speeches for show and give alms to garner their colleagues' attention.”

The moment Jesus launched his first mortal attack against the priests and the members of the Sanhedrin, the apostles who had been in charge of pitching camp on the slope of Mount Oliver entered the courtyard and joined the rest of the disciples. It was a pity that they, especially

Judas Iscariot, had not heard the first part of Jesus' discourse. Personally, I think if the traitor had been present during the first part, which offered mercy, perhaps he would have changed his mind. Based on what I could gather from that Wednesday afternoon, the last half of the Teacher's sermon at the Temple had a decisive role in Judas' defection from the group. His sense of being ridiculed and his negative conditioning to "what people will say" was much more accentuated in his soul that I had realized.

The Rabbi proceeded, "And this is how you must honor our judges and respect our teachers. Do not call any man 'father' in the spiritual sense. Only god is your father. Neither must you seek to dominate our brothers in the Kingdom. Remember: I have taught you that to be great among men you must serve everyone. If you claim to be exalted above others, before god, certainly you will be humiliated; but the one who is sincerely humble will certainly be exalted. In your daily life, seek not to glorify yourself, but god. Intelligently subordinate your own will to your father in heaven.

"Do not be confused by my words. I do not have malice for the principle priests including those who see my destruction. I do not have bad wished for the scribes and the Pharisees who reject my teachings. I know many of you secretly believe and I know there are some who will openly profess their loyalty to the Kingdom when the time comes. But, how do you justify our rabbis who say they talk with god and pretend to reject him and to destroy that which comes into the world to reveal the father.

"Oh, you scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You close the gates to the Kingdom of heaven to sincere men because they are not formally educated. You refuse to enter the Kingdom and at the same time, you do everything in your power to prevent others from entering it too. You stand with your back to the gates of salvation and hot everyone who wants to enter. Oh, you scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites! You embrace the heavens and the land in order to proselytize and when you have succeeded, you are not content until you have made two times as much evil as if you were the sons of gentiles.

"Oh, you priests and principle judges! You control the poor people's property and exact hefty tributes from those who want to serve god. What can you , who are not merciful, hope for in the coming world? Oh, you false teachers! You guide the blind. What can one expect from a nation where the blind lead the blind? Both fall into the abyss of destruction.

"Oh you who dissimulate when you take the vow. You're swindlers! You teach that a man can swear before the Temple and break his oath, but the one who swears by gold will keep a permanent link. You are blind and crazy!"

Jesus stood up. The atmosphere was charged with these truths like fists, but the whole world knew what no one dared to say out loud, much less in the presence of the Temple's dignitaries who were tenser every moment. No one was even breathing. Each time the disciples grew increasingly cowardly and lowered their gazes or faces from fear of the group of priests.

Yet the Nazarene seemed ready for anything.

"...not even the consequences of dishonesty. Which is better gold or the Temple? You teach as if a man swearing in front of the altar is insignificant. Yet if one takes an oath with the gift which is before the altar, then one is permanently a debtor. You are blind to the truth! Which is better a gift or the altar which sanctifies the gift? How can you justify such hypocrisy and dishonesty? Oh you scribes and Pharisees! You insure that they bring a tenth of mint and cumin

at the same time you are unconcerned about the more serious issue of faith, mercy, and justice. Within reason you must do one, but without forgetting to do the other.

“You are certainly blind and deaf teachers! You repel the mosquitos and bring the camel. Oh, you scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites! You scrupulously clean the outside of the cup and the serving dishes, but the inside stays filthy with extortion, excesses, and deception. You are spiritually blind. Recognize with me that it would be better to clean the inside of the cup first. Then you can go overboard in cleaning the outside. Wicked reprobates! You conform to the letter to the exterior acts of you religion while your souls are soaked in iniquity and murder.

“All of you reject the truth and scorn compassion. Many of you are like whitewashed tombs. You appear beautiful on the outside, but inside you are full of bones of men and every sort of lack of cleanliness. Even so, you refuse to know god’s advice, you appear before men as holy and righteous, but on the inside your hearts are inflamed with hypocrisy.

“Oh, you false guides of the nation! From a distance you have built monuments to the prophets who were martyred by the ancients, yet you conspire to destroy the one whom they prophesized about. You adorn the tombs of the righteous and flatter them, while you say they have lived in the time of our fathers and you have not killed the prophets. And with these highly righteous thoughts, you prepare to assassinate the one whom the prophets mentioned: the Son of Man. Well go ahead and fill the cup of your condemnation until it overflows!

“Oh, you sons of sin! John was right when he called you the offspring of snakes. And you ask me, ‘How can we escape the judgment that John pronounced for us?’”

The Nazarene remained silent for a few second while the members of the Sanhedrin who were red with rage as they were taking notes on the scrolls or “books” they carried in their arms. This behavior reminded me of another reality and as I validated it, the result would be lamentable. None of Jesus’ apostles nor his followers had taken even a single note about what or how much the Teacher said. Given the Rabbi of Galilee’s abundance of teachings and their considerable extent—an example is the speech he was giving at that moment—it was going to be a little less than impossible for his words to be recollected at a future time with integrity and complete fidelity. It was a pity that not one of the men had suggested the great importance recording the speeches and the acts of the main protagonist—the Nazarene. That night, in the camp on Mount Olivet, I had the opportunity to confirm that I was not wrong in this personal assessment...

“But in my father’s name I offer you forgiveness and mercy. Even now, I offer you my hand”, Jesus added in the gentlest, conciliatory tone. “My father sent the prophets and the wise men. You murdered the former and persecuted the latter. Then John appeared, announcing the arrival of the Son of man and you destroyed him in spite of the fact that many believed in his teachings. Now you are preparing to spill more innocent blood. Do you understand how a terrible day will come when the Judge of the whole earth will ask the reason why you have rejected, persecuted, and slaughtered these messengers from heaven? Do you understand how all of your reasons must be defeated since it was honorable blood: from the first prophet Zachariah assassinated in the time of in the sanctuary and the altar? And I will tell you more; if you continue with this wicked conduct, this account could be demanded in this generation.

“Oh, Jerusalem and children of Abraham! You have stoned the prophets and assassinated the teachers, including the one who joins you now, to our sons like the chicken who gathers her chicks under her wings...But you don’t want this! Now I am going to leave. You have heard my message and made your own decision. Those who believe in my gospel will be saved. Those who

have chosen to reject the gift of god will not see me teach in the Temple anymore. My work is done. Be careful now. I stay with my sons and our house will be desolate...”

The cruel denunciation of Jesus of Nazareth had been completely closed to the possibility of reconciliation between the leaders of the Sanhedrin and the class of priests in Jerusalem. At the end of these words, the Teacher ordered his disciples to follow him and they all left the Temple in the direction of his camp on Mount Olivet. However, one question remained floating in the atmosphere of the city: What fate awaited the Rabbi from Galilee?

As we arranged to leave, one of the twelve disciples, Matthew, recalled the Teacher’s prophecy at the peak of the mountain of olive trees. He approached Jesus, pointed to the heavy ashlar blocks on the Temple’s walls.

“Teacher, see how they constructed this building. Look at the massive stones and the beautiful ornaments. How can it be that these buildings are about to be destroyed?” he remarked with evident incredulity.

Jesus did not slow his pace through the city on his way to the Fountain Gate. “Have you seen that every stone in this Temple is strong?” he inquired. “Well, truly, truly I say that very soon days will come when no stone will be left on top of another. Everything will be cast down.”

Then the giant kept silent. The rest of the group became entangled in endless arguments as they considered how difficult it would be for the fortress to be demolished. Some of the apostles concluded that ‘not even the end of the world’ would cause the destruction of the Temple.

The day was already heading toward sunset and in an attempt to avoid the crowds of pilgrims who came and went through the Valley of Sidon, Jesus made a suggestion to the disciples that they leave the road to Bethany and take one of the paths which ran up the south slope of Mount Olivet, in the northern direction, instead. When we reached one of the summits, Jerusalem suddenly shot up on our left. It was majestic and bathed in the last golden rays of sunlight. The Sanctuary’s interior and the small alleys were starting to be illuminated by the first oil lamps. This spectacular view caused the group to stop.

One of the disciples pointed to the Holy City and asked Jesus, “Teacher, tell us, how will we know that these events are about to happen?”

The group finally sat on the grass while the Rabbi remained standing and slowly spoke.

“Yes, I will tell you that overtime these people have so filled the cup of their iniquity and that justice will fall over our father’s city...I am about to leave you. I’m going to my father. When I leave, you must take care that no man deceives you. Many will come as liberators and lead a lot of people down the bad path. When you hear rumors of wars, do not be dismayed. Although it will occur, the end of Jerusalem has not arrived yet. Neither should you worry when you are handed over to the civil authorities and are persecuted for the gospel...”

The apostles gazed at him with fear in their faces.

“You will be expelled from the synagogue and imprisoned for my sake. And some of you will die. When you are charged before governors and leaders, it will be a testimony of your faith and it will demonstrate your commitment to the Kingdom’s gospel. Moreover, when you are

before judges, do not agonize in advance about what you will say: the spirit will show you in the same moment what you must answer to your adversaries.

“In these days of pain, even our relatives will betray us into prison or death under the direction of those who reject the Son of Man. For some time you will certainly be hated and even persecuted for my cause, but I will not abandon you. My spirit will not forsake you. Be patient! Do not doubt that the Kingdom’s gospel will triumph over all enemies, and in your time, it will be proclaimed to all nations.

The Teacher said nothing as he looked at the city. And as I sat with the rest of the disciples, I marveled at the accuracy of his words. Indeed, forty years later, when Titus’ legions besieged and devastated Jerusalem, none of the apostles were in the city. This was not because the teacher had warned them. Perhaps it was more likely that some of them had perished or been taken prisoner. Andrew broke the silence.

“But Teacher, if the Holy City and the Temple are going to be destroyed and you will not be here to lead us, when should we abandon Jerusalem?”

Then Jesus endeavored to be extremely clear and precise, “You can stay in the city after I am gone even in these times of pain and bitter persecution. But when you finally see Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman soldiers, after the revolt of the false prophets, then you will know that desolation is at the gates. At that time, you must flee to the mountains. Do not allow anyone to stop you or permit anyone to enter. There will be a great tribulation. It will be the days of the gentiles’ vengeance. When you have fled the city, the disobedient people will fall under the edge of the gentile’s swords.

“Until then, I warn you: do not be fooled. If a man comes and says, ‘Look, this is the Liberator’ or ‘Look he is here’ don’t believe him. There will be many false teachers and others will be led astray. Do not let them trick you. I have already ensured that you are forewarned.”

How convincing and prophetic these words rang in my ears! The disciples and apostles could not even suspect the sublime reality of this prophecy. For anyone who has studied, regardless of how briefly, the Roman army’s advance on Jerusalem shortly before the full moon in the spring of the year 70, the Teacher’s warning was definitely succinct. Just as the Galilean had foretold, Israel was transformed into an inferno between 66 and 70. At that time, the zealot or “fanatic” party, which was armed to the teeth, ended up inciting the entire Jewish community.

In May of the year 66, the Roman garrison was crushed as the result of a petition from the procurator Gessius Florus, which demanded seventeen talents from the Temple’s treasury. The Jews took Jerusalem and prohibited the daily sacrifice in honor of the Emperor. This filled Rome’s patience to the brim. The Syrian legate Cestius Gallus sent out a legion. But the revolt had so incensed the country that the Romans were forced to retreat. The Jewish nation fortified its cities and prepared for war. Flavius Josephus was then a famous army general; later he would become a historian. Nero did entrust three legions to Titus Flavius Vespasian who fell on Galilee and pulverized it with the help of his son Titus. Then Nero committed suicide and Titus Flavius had to rush back to Rome. He put his son in charge of finalizing Rome’s final revenge.

The Hebrews were in awe to see thousands of soldiers belonging to Legions V, X, XII, and XV, accompanied by the cavalry and auxiliary troops as well as heavy assault and demolition equipment. A total of 80,000 men were taking positions and surrounding the Holy City—exactly as Jesus had prophesized in the year 30. Jerusalem was full of pilgrims who sought to subdue the

strong internal tensions generated by the ridiculous number of sudden appearances of “liberators” who tried to sway the masses with fear. Once Titus’ men began to attack, the apostles who recalled the words Jesus spoke on that distant evening on Tuesday April 4 in the year 30 when he stood opposite Jerusalem, had already escaped from the city. A few months later, a piece of Roman artillery capable of throwing one hundred kilogram stones a distance of 185 meters, destroyed Jerusalem and left no stone on top of another.

In spite of his goodwill, Peter did not seem to understand Jesus’ warning. Peter concluded that Jesus’ comments were associated with the destruction at “the end of the world” and not the fall of Jerusalem. The way he formulated a question for the Rabbi fully convinced me of this.

“But Teacher, all of us know these things will occur when the new heaven and the new earth appear. How will we know then that you come to bring all of this?” Peter pointed out.

The giant regarded Peter with infinite compassion realizing that his fiery friend had not comprehended his message. “I say Peter, you always err because you always relate the new teachings to the old. You are determined to misinterpret my teaching. You insist on interpreting the gospel according to your established beliefs. However, I will try to explain it to you.

“Why do you continue searching for the Son of Man who sits on the throne of David and hoping that he will fulfill the Jews’ material dreams? The things you value now will end and there will be a new beginning, which is part of the spread of the Kingdom’s gospel throughout the world. When the Kingdom reaches its full effect, be assured that the heavenly father will not fail to visit you. My father will continue manifesting his mercy and showing his love even in a dark and evil world. After this, my father has conferred all power and authority to me.

“I will also follow your destinies and guide you in matters of the gospel with the presence of my spirit which will soon be relieved of the flesh. Therefore, I will be present among you in the spirit and I promise that sometime I will return to this world, where you live, this life of flesh and simultaneously reveal god in man and bring man to god. I will leave you very soon and accomplish the work my father has put in my hands. But take courage: I will return again. In the meantime, my true spirit will comfort and guide you.”

Jesus had unexpectedly passed from the prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem to a topic which deeply interested me and that I had already discussed with him, namely his promised but confusing second coming to Earth. So all of my senses were focused on his words which were poorly interpreted and badly transmitted to the future by his followers.

“Now you see me weak and in the flesh. But when I return it will be with power and spirit,” the Rabbi emphasized as he shifted his gaze in my direction. “The eye of the flesh sees the Son of Man in the flesh, but only the eyes of the spirit can behold the Son of Man who is glorified by the father and appears on Earth with his own name. Yet only the Council of Paradise knows the time of the Son of Man’s reappearance. Not even the angels know when it will happen. However, you must understand that when this gospel of the Kingdom has been proclaimed throughout the world for man’s salvation, when the fullness of the time has arrived, the father will send another whom he will grant a divine designation: the Son of Man and he will return to close the epoch.”

Upon hearing these revelations, I was still perplexed. I was tempted to have a word with Jesus and question him about this mysterious “closure” of an epoch. But my situation required me to strictly observe and stay on the edge of the conversation.

“And now, in respect to Jerusalem’s pain, I honestly tell you this generation will not elapse without fulfilling my words. As for the second coming of the Son of Man, no one on heaven or Earth can claim to speak about it.”

As if reading my thoughts the Rabbi continued with these words, “You must be wise about a time’s maturity. You should be alert in order to discern the signs of the times. You know that when the fig tree shows its tender branches and sprouting leaves that summer is near. Similarly, when the world has gone through a long winter of mental material and you see the coming spiritual spring, then you must know the summer has arrived for my new visit.”

Out of all of the Nazarene's teachings, none, in my opinion produced as much mental confusion for his apostles and his sympathizers as this one. When one reads what glorious things have been written after his death about the second coming and the destruction of Jerusalem, and knows, as I do, the true meaning of Jesus’ discourse on that Tuesday at dusk, one cannot but feel a great desolation. At least in this part, the canonical gospels were poorly constructed. Unfortunately, it was not going to be the only passage that was ignored or misinterpreted by the evangelists...

When the group set out on the trail again, a nearly full moon had already risen in the east. Jesus resumed his position at the head of the group and we continued the trek up the rugged peak of Mount Olivet always bearing north. Once we were close to the public camp ground where the pilgrims from Galilee were staying, the Teacher turned right making a circle around the shops and countless bonfires that were distinguishable on the west side of the mountain a short distance away. Evidently, the Rabbi did not wish to encounter his friends and compatriots again.

Minutes later, when we were in front of the Temple’s sanctuary, we began to descend to the Cedron. We walked along one of the footpaths from Jerusalem to Bethany. The darkness did not allow me to clearly identify our surroundings, yet I deduced we were not very far from converging on the “point of contact” where the module was parked. Perhaps there were 1,000 to 1,500 feet between our current position and Eliseo. Then the group passed over one of the natural platforms that were so plentiful on the west side of this mountain of olive trees. In any case, the next morning I was able to explore the terrain at my leisure. I observed it was an esplanade seventy or eighty meters long and thirty to forty meters wide. It was perfectly enclosed by a low stone wall barely a meter high. I discerned an enormous stone vat that was one meter wide and 1.5 meters tall on the side of the rectangle closest to the wrought iron gated entrance. Rows of olive trees stood in the background with their gruesome tortured trunks indistinct in the darkness.

Jesus and the disciples went straight to the right of the olive grove. A few paces away, the Nazarene’s men had set up two rudimentary tents or shelters close to the wall. The roof consisted of various pieces of tarred cloth joined at the base with ropes. The canvas, which measured about four feet long by three feet wide, appeared to be supported in the front by two rigid conifer branches. The main support was in the center of the tent. The roof terminated at the stone wall where the fabric had been stretched and secured with heavy rocks. The sides were also formed by two panels with goat hides badly sewn between them. The entrance was two meters above the dusty, reddish soil and lacked protection. In the light from the campfire that burned opposite the two tents, I could see that the floor of the tents was covered with mantles and mats. I also detected some bulky shapes in the rear of the tent. I supposed these were belongings and cooking equipment. But as I say, the darkness was so dense that I preferred to postpone a more exhaustive survey of this land, which was an orchard and a garden both owned by elderly Simon “the leper”, until the following day.

The reunion with the rest of the disciples raised the low spirits of the men who had accompanied Jesus. Soon we were seated around the fire. The temperature had decreased noticeably, consequently the apostles sat tightly packed against each other and wrapped in their heavy cloaks. There among the ochre gleam of the fig and walnut tree branches that Philip was responsible for supplying and had abundantly supplied while the fire crackled under a starry sky, I met a little boy who was about twelve or thirteen years old. His head was shaved, there were prominent bags under his eyes, and he did not say a single word. He followed the Rabbi's teachings and gestures with an interest and a devotion and interest I had not seen prior to that moment. His name was John Mark and he was going to play an important role in the upcoming hours on Thursday.

The conversation that Jesus had with the apostles as they were returning to the campsite at Gethsemane spread to all of the disciples and weighted very heavily on the Rabbi. The subject of his departure did not delay its debut into the midst of these slow thinking, rough men. Thomas had the first word. He addressed a question to the Teacher, "Since you are going to return to finish the work on the Kingdom, what must be our attitude towards the Father's business while you are away?"

Jesus sat on the other side of the fire playing with a stick and stirring the fire. The flames gave his face a strange majesty. With enviable patience, the Nazarene watched Thomas over the fire.

"Thomas, not even you can fail to understand what I am saying. Haven't I taught you that our relation to the Kingdom is spiritual and individual? What else can I say to you? I have described the fallen nations, the end of the imperial domination, the destruction of the unbelieving Jews, the end of the era, even the end of the world. What can be done to someone who believes in the gospel and has a sheltered life in the safety of the eternal Kingdom? You, who believe in god and in the gospel, have already received the security of eternal life. Since your lives are in the Father's hands, there is nothing for you to worry about.

"As citizens of the heavenly world and builders of the Kingdom, you must not fret about tempests, earthquakes, or be disturbed by terrestrial catastrophes. What importance is it to you if nations sink, epochs end, and all visible things collapse, if you know that your life is a gift from the Son and that you are eternally secure with the Father? After having lived your temporal life in faith and delivered the fruits of the spirit as proof of your service to humanity, you can look forward to the future with confidence.

"Each generation of believers must carry out their work with a view to the possible return of the Son of Man in exactly the same way every particular believer carries on his life in view of the inevitable and always imminent natural death. When you have established yourselves as children of god, there is nothing more to concern you. But make no mistake. This living faith increasingly manifests the fruits of that divine spirit which was inspired for the first time in the human heart. You have accepted that being children of the heavenly kingdom will not spare you from the persistent rejection of these truths by those who have seen the progressive spiritual fruits of the children of god incarnate. You who have been with me while I did my Father's business on Earth, could leave this Kingdom now. If you see that you do not like the form of humanity's service to the father, as individuals and as believers, listen to me while I tell you a parable....

Without the desire to hear Jesus' last words, I turned my gaze on Judas Iscariot. The man who had already deserted in his heart followed the Teacher's words with a coldness that gave me chills.

"There was a certain man who called all of his close servants and entrusted them with all of his assets before he left on a long trip to another country." The Nazarene proceeded, "One of them was given five *talents*, another was given two *talents*, and the third servant received one *talent*. They were all entrusted with property in accordance with their different skills. When the owner was gone, his servants went to work on gaining benefits from the fortune he had entrusted them with.

"The one who received five *talents* began to trade with them immediately. Very soon he made a profit of five *talents*¹. Similarly, the one who received two talents gained another two talents quickly. Thus all of the servants accumulated new gains for their master, except for the third. This last one made a hole in the ground and hid the money there. The owner returned unexpectedly and called his servants to him. The one who received the five talents, came forward and delivered the ten talents.

"Sir, you have given me five *talents* and I am pleased to give you another five.'

"Then the master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You will be the steward of many.'

"Next, the one who received two *talents* came forward. 'Sir, you entrusted two *talents* into my hands. Look, I have gained another two.'

"His master replies, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have also been loyal and now we will put you in charge of the others.'

"He finally reaches the one who had received a single *talent*.

"Sir, I know you are an astute man because you hope to earn when you personally did not work. So, I was afraid of risking what you had entrusted in me. I kept your talent stored in the Earth and it is here. Now you have what belongs to you.'

"But the master countered, 'You are a lazy, indolent servant. By your own words, you have confessed that you knew you were going to be asked to produce a reasonable gain like your colleagues have done. Knowing that, at least you could have put my money in the bankers' hands. They would have given me my money with interest when I returned.'

"Then the owner ordered the chief servant, 'Take the *talent* away from this servant and give it to the one who has ten.'

"The one who has everything, will be given much more and he will have abundance. However, the one who has nothing, as well as the one who has little, will have theirs taken away. You cannot sit still in the affairs of the eternal Kingdom. My father demands that all of his children grow in grace and knowledge of the truth. Those of you who know these truths, must produce an increase in the fruits of the spirit and manifest a growing devotion in the generous

¹ Depending on the logical financial fluctuations, a *talent* could be equal to about 3,000 silver *shekels*, which is approximately 12,000 silver *denarii*. Hence, eight *talents* were a considerable fortune [Major's note].

service to your colleagues. And remember to give to the least of my brothers who have done service for me. This is the way you must do my father's work, now and later. Continue until I return.

“The truth is life. The spirit of the truth always leads the children of the light to new realms of spiritual reality and divine service. The truth is not given to you to crystallize into safe, set, honorable ways. What will future generations of the holders of the truth think, if they hear, ‘Teacher, here is the truth which you have entrusted with us for hundreds or thousands of years. We have lost nothing. We have faithfully preserved everything you gave us. We have not allowed changes in what you taught us. Here is the truth you gave us.’ You have freely received, therefore you must freely give away the truth of heaven. Truly, truly, I say that this truth will multiply and radiate new light, even when you minister it.”

It was well into the night when the group rose and dispersed into their tents. However, Jesus remained alone in front of the bonfire immersed in his thoughts. I settled at the foot of one of the ancient olive trees and wrapped myself in my mantle. Before the Nazarene had retired to rest in one of the tents, I had already yielded to sleep.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 5

A little before the swallows awakened the camp at dawn with their black tumultuous circles, Eliseo alerted me via the auditory connection about the proximity of daybreak.

“The *cradle* records a temperature of 9°C. There’s a slight decrease in relative humidity...It seems as though the wind has increased. I foresee gusts of wind twenty to forty knots, particularly in the afternoon. Good luck!”

Eliseo was not mistaken. I wanted the first moments of the day to be especially chilly. My sky blue mantle was dotted with innumerable dewdrops. The same thing had happened to the sparse grass that broke off at the foot of the olive trees. Consistent with the dawn, a distant and mysterious clacking sound began to intrigue me. It seemed to originate from some area at the back of the campsite.

I stood up and cast an eye over the camp to verify that everything was calm. The disciples were asleep inside their tents. Other people slept wrapped in their clothes at the foot of the stone wall or beneath the first row olive trees as I had. In front of the lodgings, at the small clearing near the entrance to the orchard, I could distinguish the ashes from the fire. I assumed the Teacher was still sleeping. However, that clacking sound continued to break Gethsemane’s deep silence and fill each increasingly luminous moment of the morning. I did not hesitate any longer. I picked up “Moses’ staff” and headed to the farm’s interior, following the curve of the wall.

This property belonged to Simon, the neighbor from Bethany, who had devoted it exclusively to the cultivation of olive trees. The elevation of the ground slightly increased from the place where the tents were pitched. When I arrived at the far end of the orchard, I counted fifty old olive trees arranged in rows four deep. I was impressed by the size of some of the trees, one of them must have had a circumference measuring almost eight meters. A reddish brown substance, which flowed down the knotty, tortured trunks and formed small trickles, glistened in the incipient sun that was already rising behind the peak of Mount Olivet. The last square meters of the rectangle that defined the olive orchard where Jesus’ famous sermon was going to take place, were at a much higher elevation. The mysterious noise had become clearer and louder.

Once I had left the olive trees behind, within ten meters, a stony mass five meters tall appeared before me. It had an entrance which was wider than it was tall (I had to stoop enter it) that lead into a natural cavern. White limestone formations spilled out of the front of the cave, heavily eroded by wind and rain. The presence of this rocky mass and the stones, which were barely 30 to 40 centimeters high, that occupied one end of the orchard, explained why Simon had not made use of the land on the northern boundary to grow olive trees. A huge tree grew to the right of the rock, almost as if it were glued to it. When I looked up, I saw the reason for the unusual snapping sound. It was produced by a cassia fistula. This beautiful specimen—very similar to the walnut—was constantly swaying in the wind. As it did so, its long fruits collided thereby, emitting that penetrating clatter. Between the tree and the low stone wall, which at that point attached to the east side of the cave, I discovered a small grove of *ferula gummosa* and *astragalus*, both of which have well known medicinal virtues.

The grotto was practically plunged in darkness. It was 19 meters deep and 10 meters wide. The roof was very low along the first few meters of the entrance, but it was significantly higher farther inside. Its walls had been whitewashed. On the east side of the cave’s interior, two

prolongations or smaller grottos appeared. One of these contained a wooden press, undoubtedly used for crushing the oil out of the olives, based upon its smell and the leftover oil that soaked the inside of the press. A large beam, which served as the press's arm was embedded in a narrow cavity located about a meter from the south side of the cavern's wall. Several sacks rested on the floor matting on the north side of the back of the cave. Two of these contained wheat, while the remaining three held dry figs, various kinds of vegetables, onions, leeks, garlic, etc. (Later I learned these were the supplies Philip had purchased the previous morning. They formed the basic diet of the people in the camp.)

I also inspected the outside of the cavern. I explored how the north side of the cave—opposite from the entrance—had been made into a channel which descended into a sort of purification basin. Simon had excavated the top of the enormous rock, taking advantage of the rainwater that would descend through the crevice into the basin. The water was filtered as it dropped through the tunnel, then it accumulated in the basin, which was also carved out of the rock. Once I had satisfied my curiosity, I returned to the camp. This time I followed the western wall.

When I arrived at the entrance to the orchard, some of the women in Jesus' group toiled around an incipient fire. While, two women ground the grain, preparing the wheat flour, others carried water filling a variety of bowls. The large stone cask I had seen the night before to the right of the iron gate and close to the wall was an old, perfectly circular oil extractor or mill which measured about four meters in diameter and had a parapet 80 to 90 centimeters high. It was empty. One end of a heavy, completely blackened log was inserted into an open niche in the stone wall which laid in the exact geometrical center of the vat. This beam, which had been supplied for the huge circular flat stone, was attached at its other end with thick ropes that crossed through the holes on both sides of its center. From what I could gather, when the mill was in full of olives, the enormous weight of the point of the wood must act like a press and crush the olives. There was a large pile of esparto baskets at the bottom of the vat; these might have been used to transport the oil.

At around seven o'clock in the morning, Jesus of Nazareth appeared in the clearing as I was examining the vat. He was the first one to leave the men's tent. I stood still. The giant was barefoot and free of his mantle. He walked a few steps to the fire and, after greeting the women, held his large hands close to the fire in order to warm them. Then he raised his face to the blue sky and closed his eyes, taking a deep inhalation. The sun's tepid rays caressed and illuminated his bronzed skin.

One of the women pulled the Teacher out of these pleasant moments, pointing out that the earthenware tub was prepared with water for his bath. Jesus responded to the disciple with a smile. With total ease, he pulled his white tunic over his head through its wide neckline. Under this garment the Rabbi wore a type of loincloth, which was also white, that covered his lower abdomen and buttocks. This item consisted of a simple band of cloth, possibly cotton, about thirty centimeters wide with a cord sewn onto one of its ends that he used to tie it around his waist. The part that was sewn to the narrow waist draped so that it covered his buttocks, then passed between his legs where it was tied with two other shorter cords each set in a corner of the fabric. The final edge of the loincloth was attached to a tiny cord at this waist. It concealed his genitals and part of his stomach.

Once the Galilean was naked, he knelt beside the wide container. He put his hands in the water and began to wash his face, chest, armpits, and arms. In a question of seconds, this muscular body—without a gram of fat—was covered with water. The giant immediately grabbed

a quadrangular bone colored bar and commenced rubbing it energetically. There was not delay in the appearance of a thin white foam. Presently the Teacher considered himself sufficiently lathered, he bent over the pan again and proceeded to rinse.

Minutes later, the Galilean stood and the same woman who had prepared the water gave him a linen cloth very similar to the one I had seen in Lazarus' house and that Martha used to dry my hand and feet. Jesus took this special sort of towel and dried his body. In conclusion, he tossed his head back and shaking his hair. Before he put his tunic back on, he extended his hands and the woman poured a few drops of an oily liquid into one of his palms.¹ Following the custom of that era, the Nazarene spread the essence continuously over his armpits, neck, torso, and hair until they were covered. Finally, he lifted the edge of his tunic, stepped into the vessel, and washed his feet.

While Jesus finished tying on his sandals with the rawhide laces, Philip, Andrew, and the other disciples began to leave the tent. At that instant, little John Mark appeared at the campsite, carrying a basket. Without saying a word, he delivered it to one of the women and sat down next to the fire. He never let Jesus out of his sight.

Some of the apostles imitated the Teacher and then, once their ablutions were done, settled into their places around the fire, ready for breakfast. The women started to pass out hot milk. One of them pulled back the cloth over John Mark's basket and, with lively demonstrations of delight, showed the disciples the two generous loaves of bread. Philip took charge of slicing the bread and passing it around.

I used these moments to draw near the basin where the Lord and his men had washed and examine the bar of soap. I immediately perceived the very agreeable scent of rosemary. One woman, who saw me so absorbed by the soap walked over to me and burst into raucous laughter.

"Jason, don't eat that...", she warned me.

I did not feel inconvenienced when the good woman went into detail about how the soap was made. At times when they do not have hoof tallow, they use the bone marrow from cows instead. As soon as it is melted in hot water, it is mixed with oil combined with the essence of rosemary—as in this case—or other perfumes such as thyme, orange blossom, or lemon juice. After that it is only a matter of transferring the liquid into some rudimentary wooden or iron molds and waiting.

If the group had the time and the money, the women prefer to perfume the soap with opium. Some shepherds were engaged in selling it. It was easy enough to obtain, if one had the patience to comb the beards of the goats which had grazed in the ticks. The resin in question impregnated the tufts of fur on the animals, so the shepherds only need to retrieve it. As I was paying attention to the woman, I did not realize someone was standing behind me.

As I turned around, I received a new surprise. It was Jesus. He brought me a steaming bowl of milk in his left hand and a slice of bread in his right. On seeing my amazed expression, he smiled mischievously, winked at me again and invited me to accept the quick meal. As I grasped the bread and the container, my fingers brushed his skin and I noticed with alarum how

¹ According to one of the disciples, this oily liquid was made in Jerusalem from the same reddish brown sap I had seen seeping out of the olive trees. *Santa Claus* confirmed that this product, called *lac gum* was made from a white, crystalline substance identifiable by the name *Olivila* [Major's note].

my heart multiplied its pumping. How difficult it was to maintain my objectivity in front of this extraordinary human specimen!

I could not understand it very well. Why were Jesus of Nazareth's disciples so silent? This was a tense breakfast. No one was willing to open his or her mouth. Certainly, the events of the last few days and above all the specter of the Sanhedrin's decrees against the Teacher were hovering over the hearts of these men. However, it was annoying that the Nazarene was the least troubled person in the group. Some of the twelve apostles still carried their swords at their side. That night, as on the previous night, they had established a routine surveillance at the gates to the campsite.

Judas Iscariot was the last one to leave the tent. His red eyes and lined face gave the impression that he had not slept much. He finished his portion and, like the rest of his companions, remained seated, yet distracted. At last, the Teacher broke the silence.

"Today I want to rest. We will take the time ponder everything which has happened since we came to Jerusalem. Reflect upon what is on the point of arriving..."

Jesus' decision surprised some of those present. Everyone believed the Rabbi was going to re-enter the Temple and address the multitudes. Notwithstanding, the Galilean stood up, confirmed his decision, and made the manager of the group, who was thinking about retiring for the whole day, understand that he must not enter the gates of the Holy City under any pretext. Andrew nodded and Jesus withdrew inside the tent.

I confess that this confused me even more than it did the disciples, albeit for very different reasons. What was the Nazarene's intention? Where was he thinking of going? My mission was to follow Jesus of Nazareth's footsteps. He was where I was or where I stayed and always when my presence would not motivate a change in historical facts.

At the same time, the Trojan Horse project had assigned me the difficult, pressing task of making contact with the Roman governor. It was vital for Pontius Pilate to know about me and for me to meet him personally. This would facilitate my entry into Antonia's Tower next Friday morning. Moreover, Joseph of Arimathea had hand set this appointment for this very Wednesday morning. What should I do?

To top it off, a thought had begun to pester me. What was Judas plotting in his brain? Something in the depths of my being said today was going to be decisive for the traitor's plans and decisions. I must keep current. As I mentioned earlier, I was especially drawn to Judas. In essence, this was because he was the only one who rebelled against everything.

So I found myself plunged in a serious state of apprehension when I saw Jesus emerge from the entrance to the tent. He was carrying his cloak and he had tied a large handkerchief or "shroud" around his head. This indicated he intended to go for a walk and a long one at that. At that moment, David Zebedee, who was the burliest disciple, the fastest thinker, and would play an extraordinarily practical and effective role during the terrible episodes on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, forestalled the giant with the following reasoning as he stepped forward.

"Teacher, you know very well that the Pharisees and the Temple leaders seek to destroy you. In spite of that, you prepare to go on a walk alone in the hills. This is crazy. At least order three armed men to accompany you so they can protect you."

First the Galilean looked at David Zebedee, he continued by surveying the three strong men who were servants of the impulsive disciple and were waiting a certain distance away. Then in a tone which did not admit a rebuttal nor a discussion he replied so that all of us could hear him.

“You are right, David. However, you are mistaken about one thing: the Son of Man does not need anyone to defend him. No man can put his hands on me until the hour when I must give my life just as my father wishes. These men are not going to accompany me. I want to go alone and be alone so I can commune with my father.”

After listening to Jesus, David Zebedee and his guards retreated and I felt something had broken inside me. I also understood I could not follow the protagonist of my exploration. For some reason, which he did not want to specify, the Teacher had to be alone. Yet, when I had given up on this part of the mission as lost, something occurred that caused me to recover my hopes and luckily enabled me to reconstruct part of what Jesus did that Wednesday.

As the Rabbi walked toward the entrance to the orchard, ready to disappear in god knows what direction, the boy who had brought the basket of bread, shot through the disciples, running after the Teacher. As soon as the Rabbi saw him, he paused. John Mark had filled the same basket with food and water. He proposed that if the Rabbi was thinking about passing the day on the mountain, at least he could bring a few provisions. Jesus smiled and leaned over to take the basket, but the boy anticipated the Galilean and held on to the basket with all of his strength as he spoke.

“But Lord, what if you forget the basket when you go to pray?” he hinted in a shy voice. “I will go with you and carry the food. That way you will be freer for your devotion.”

Before Jesus could reply, the little boy tried to assure him.

“I will keep quiet...I won’t ask questions...I will sit next to the basket while you are far away praying.”

The disciples who witnessed the scene were shocked at John’s audacity. The Teacher smiled again. He stroked the boy’s head.

“It’s clear that you yearn to do this with all of your heart. I won’t deny you. We will go alone and we’ll have a nice trip. You can ask me to go right from your soul. We will comfort and console each other. You can carry the basket. When you feel tired, I’ll help. Follow me.”

And they both disappeared up the hillside. No one made the least comment. The apostles’ faces revealed complete dismay. It was painful that a simple child had won the match. I suppose all of those present—except Judas Iscariot—had a burning desire to accompany the Teacher. Yet none had been able to opening his heart and speak to Jesus with the sincerity of John Mark. Now the surprise was turning into a poorly disguised disgust.

Within minutes, several of Jesus’ confidants were entangled in a bitter dispute about the advisability of the Rabbi’s committing himself to walking through the mountains of Judea without a guard and with an “errand boy” for company. The discussion began to fascinate me. All of them contributed arguments that were more or less valid, but no one seemed willing to acknowledge publically the true reason they had been left behind. The debate was gradually

heating up, when I suddenly saw Judas walking stealthily towards the orchard's entrance in the direction of Cedron's Gorge.

I did not hesitate. After I reminded Andrew about my appointment with Joseph of Arimathea, and announced I would come back when I could. I went through the stone enclosure, trying not to lose sight of Iscariot. He was down on a narrow trail, which led to a small bridge over the Cedron's dry riverbed and linked the Temple's eastern esplanade to the Mount of Olives. With resolute steps, Judas passed though the place where I had witnessed the test of the "bitter waters". He stopped at the checkpoint under the arch at the Temple's East Gate. As he was jumbled among the numerous pilgrims who were coming and going, I could see how the traitor kissed another Hebrew. Both of them went into the Court of the Gentiles. I adopted every precaution as I too entered the Temple.

I arrived just in time to watch Judas and his companion climb the stairs of the Sanctuary and vanish through the Corinthian Gate. I cursed my bad stars. This was definitely one of the few places in Jerusalem where a gentile could not enter. The sanctuary was sacred. There was no room for strategy here, even less with my disguise as a foreign merchant. What could I do to follow in Judas' footsteps? I had let myself collapse on the stairs where the Teacher usually sat and was attempting to find a way to discover the reason that had brought the apostle inside the Sanctuary, when one of the Sadducees, who was a friend of Joseph of Arimathea and who had attended the luncheon for Jesus last Thursday, came to simplify my problem.

The man recognized me and in the interest of my health, asked me why I looked so depressed. After deliberating on the possible consequences of an idea hatching in my mind, I decided to talk to him. I requested that he maintain the strictest secrecy about whom I was going to tell him about. The Sadducee agreed in a tone that seemed sincere. I explained that I had fundamental suspicions about a lack of loyalty from one of the disciples of the Rabbi from Galilee. I added that I had just seen Judas enter the Sanctuary and I feared for Jesus' safety. The former member of the Sanhedrin (this Sadducee was one of the nineteen men who had tendered their resignations to the Caiaphas) tried to calm me by assuring me this was not new.

"Many of us," he replied, "know that Judas Iscariot does not agree with the Teacher or the way he acts."

Despite his words, I pretended I was not satisfied and begged him enter the Temple and try to learn about Judas' plan. But before he would respond to my appeal, this priest who secretly believed in Jesus' doctrine, questioned me as he sought an explanation for my strange behavior.

"I also believe in the Teacher," I lied, "and I don't want him to be destroyed."

My words must have sounded firm because the Sadducee smiled and gave me a pat on the back as he agreed to fulfill my wish. Prior to going our separate ways, I mentioned I had an appointment with Joseph that morning and, if it was convenient, we could see each other again before sunset at the residence of his friend from Arimathea.

"Above all," I insisted vehemently, "for basic security reasons this must stay between us."

My new friend acquiesced in a low voice and I, now somewhat more at ease, resumed my journey to the lower city. As I approached the Joseph's house, I was assaulted by an unsettling misgiving: had I really been lying when I told the Sadducee I also believed in Jesus of Nazareth?

Joseph of Arimathea received me with a certain amount of anxiety. The incidents at the camp at Gethsemane and my pursuit of Judas had briefly delayed my arrival at the elder's house. Without wasting any time, Jesus' lean friend wrapped himself in a luxurious flame colored red wool mantle and picked up a medium sized amphora with a capacity of about one eighth of an *efa* or 5.6 liters. The appointment with the Roman prefect had been set for the fifth hour (about eleven o'clock in the morning) and, like me, Joseph did not like waiting, nor making others wait. As we left the mansion, I inquired if the venerable member of the Sanhedrin would allow me to carry the jar. Joseph assented whole-heartedly. Although I was curious about the contents of the jug, my companion's silence inclined me not to formulate any questions on the subject

The road to Antonia's Fortress, which was located northwest of the city, was relatively long. However, the Roman's general barracks were arranged at an angle to the most western entrance to the Temple (as I believe I mentioned previously, this fortification was situated adjacent to the colossal rectangle that was the Sanctuary and its courtyard). I suppose, for the sake of caution, Joseph avoided the vicinity of the Temple at all times. We left behind the city's intricate labyrinth of narrow alleys, then we passed over the Tyropoeon Valley, which formed a slight depression and a natural separation of Jerusalem's two major districts: the lower and the upper. The huge theater appeared on our left and a short distance away, we faced the main street of Jerusalem's upper district.

It was the same as what I had already seen in the lower district. This road meandered from Herod's Palace on the western edge of the city to the west wall of the Temple near of the Sixth Esplanade and was adorned with thick columns¹. Its porticos were lined with a bazaar of vendors consisting of rows of sellers who were considered impure. These were the makers of all sorts of artistic objects from potters and blacksmiths, to perfumers and tailors, wool merchants, etc. The shouting, confusion, and "symphony" of odors was identical to those in the lower district or Akra.

Joseph quickened his pace as he went under the Fish Gate at the intersection of the second northern wall with the ravine or Tyropoeon Valley. I never knew whether the elder's haste was due to the presence of the merchants close to the gate who sold every type of fish or the proximity of Antonia's Fortress. In the end, the case was that both of us found ourselves facing a stone wall a meter and a half high, which completely encircled the impressive "castle" being the headquarters of Pontius Pilate during the Easter holiday.

Even though I already had the opportunity to contemplate, the soldiers stationed at Antonia's Fortress from a distance when Jesus provoked a stampede in the Gentile's Courtyard and they were sent to restore order in the Gentile's Courtyard, the presence of the Roman sentinels at the gates of the wall still made me feel uneasy. Joseph addressed one of them in Aramaic, but the soldiers did not understand the Israeli's language. Next, somewhat annoyed, the man from Arimathea spoke to him in Greek. However, the legionnaire continued not to understand.

I view of the sad situation, the young Roman—I guess he could not have been more than 20 or 25 years old—gestured for us to wait, then he turned around and walked into the interior.

¹ During my preparation for this mission, the Trojan Horse project provided me with a replica of a map of Madaba. The original was a mosaic from the seventh century and is still preserved in a Greek church of the same name. On this map, these two main streets appeared with colonnades—which formed the actual backbones of Jerusalem's two neighborhoods or zones [Major's note].

The second sentinel remained impassive and mute as he blocked the passage with his long *pilum* or lance. Under his brilliant green iron and bronze helmet, the legionnaire's eyes did not lose sight of us. He was wearing the usual uniform for a campaign: a coat of braided iron chain mail worn like a short mid-thigh length tunic, which protected his entire trunk, abdomen, and lower extremities. The cuirass, which had outstanding strength and flexibility, was in direct contact with a leather jerkin with the same shape and dimensions as the chain mail. Finally, the heavy attire rested over a red short sleeved tunic which hung ten or fifteen centimeters below the armor and just above the man's knees. The sandals were made with thick, strong leather soles. An elaborate system of animal skin straps, which were perfectly stitched around the perimeter of the shoe, protected the soldier's feet. (On a later opportunity, when I examined one of these meticulous sandals and I counted fifty strips of tanned cowhide). The soldier tied these laces over the over the top of his foot and around this foot and above his ankles.

But it was not much later, when I was on the courtyard of the fortress, that I had the occasion to discover one of the dreadful characteristics of this apparel item. The uniform was completed with a leather belt, which was five centimeters wide and covered with an endless number of nail heads. Eight leather stripes covered with small metal circles radiated from its center. The purpose of this decoration was, above all, to protect the mercenaries' lower abdomen.

The famous Hispanic sword hung from his right side. It was fifty centimeters long and perfectly sheathed in wood reinforced with bronze. The *semispathae* or dagger, which hung on the opposite side, was approximately half the length of the *Gladius Hispaniensis*.

I noticed both of the soldiers' shields were leaning in a corner of the room formed by the gate and the wall. They were rectangular, slightly convex and eighty centimeters tall. There was an *umbo* or circular metal protuberance decorated with a yellow eagle, on a red background which stood out from the rest of the shield. It was fringed with a metal edge. Four concentric squares were exquisitely painted in its center following the pattern of black, yellow, black, yellow, from smallest to largest. The largest corners had been replaced by swastikas or fylfots that were also black. The handles were formed by two straps: one for the arm, the other for the hand.

Without a doubt out of all of the combat equipment, the lance fascinated me the most. The *pilum* must have been more than two meters in long. Of this, the distance from the middle to the end of the shaft was made of iron. The end was constructed of very lightweight wood, which was not greater than thirty millimeters in diameter. The spear was forged from iron. I observed a very short cylindrical reinforcement in the middle of the weapon. This served as a handle and probably regulated the javelin's center of gravity.

As a result of this exercise of reflecting upon army life and its organization, I understood how and why they had come so far in their conquests...The sentinel caught my gaze absorbed in the shiny steel point of the arrowhead at the tip of his lance. With a mischievous smile, he tilted the *pilum* until the sharp point rested a palm's length from my chest. Joseph was frightened. For an instant I tried to imagine what would happen if the soldier had tried to stab me with the weapon. Mostly likely the sentry's shock at seeing the snake's skin prevent the *pilum* from penetrating my torso or breaking the *pilum* altogether, would have been greater than mine. The serpent's skin that covered my body was perfectly designed to withstand this type of attack.

Far from leaning back or showing anxiety, I returned his smile with a more intense one, thereby making him understand I knew it was a joke. This gesture, which the soldier interpreted

as an act of courage and consequently evaluated me as worthy of his respect was—as I proposed—going to be very useful during the arrest of the Galilean the following night.

At that moment, the sentinel who had gone inside the fortress demanded our presence from the Tower Gate. Joseph and I traversed the 10 to 15 meters of wasteland that separated the wall or exterior parapet from a stone in a trench measuring fifty cubits (22.50 meters). This was excavated by Herod when he ordered the renovation an old Maccabee fortress and gave it the name Antonia's Fortress in honor of Mark Anthony.

The trench, which was dry at this time, went around the perimeter of the Roman governor's residence, with the exception of the south face where, as I already explained the building, the building leaned on the north wall of the Temple. Its foundation consisted of a completely smooth gigantic stone which was completely smooth on its top and sides.

In anticipation of possible attacks, Herod had covered these stones with enormous iron plates that made access to them impracticable. Here would be the place for Pilate's successive interrogations of Jesus, as well as the savage punishment by flogging. As we crossed a drawbridge which was five meters long and built on a base of thick metal covered tree trunks—I could not resist the temptation to look up.

The blue grey stone façade was forty cubits tall and had being divided into two sections with perfectly symmetric crenellations. Each one of these blocks, which were about fifty meters long, had three rows of narrow windows that were the pocket windows for the first floor. In the center between the two rows, which formed the façade, there was a kind of balcony or vantage point. It was approximately twenty meters long with some of the smallest battlements, as compared to those in the upper areas.

Each of the "castle's" four corners had been reinforced with identical fortified towers. I knew the dimensions from Joseph Flavius, yet when I saw them from such a short distance, they seemed more graceful to me.¹In the mouth of the tunnel, which constituted the principle entrance to the fortress, the sentinel who we had met earlier outside the wall, and an officer awaited us. When I discovered what he held in his right hand was a wooden truncheon, I understood I was facing a centurion. He was taller than the average soldier, perhaps this was on account of the red crest of feathers which decorated his helmet.

Presently Joseph greeted him, identifying himself to the centurion as a friend of the governor who had arranged an audience with him this morning. The centurion, who also spoke Greek, returned the greeting and asked me for identification. Afterwards one of the soldiers from the mounted guard led us through a door into a room located on the right of the tunnel sand asked another soldier a question.

The centurion was in a rush to enter what must have been the guard's room, and returned momentarily with a waxed board. Many names had been written on this particular "chalk board." A short well-worn rope was attached to the upper left hand corner of the tablet's frame. It was tied around a bronze nail about eight centimeters long, which judging from the lines on the polished surface, used as a burin or stylus.

¹ In Volume six of his work *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus alleges that three of the towers were 50 cubits (22.50 meters tall) and the fourth , was semidetached from the Temple and 70 cubic meter s (31.50 meters tall).This data is fairly close our measurements from the module's [Major's note].

The centurion read the tablet and returned it to the mercenary who disappeared into the room again. By then several soldiers who formed the *excubiae* or day guards in the sector of the fortress and were resting on one of the wooden benches in the room came to the door to peer out and observe us with interest.

“What’s in that jug?” A centurion asked unexpectedly.

Thank heavens Joseph came forward.

“This is wine from the cellars in Gibeon...I know the governor likes it”

“They must open it,” replied the officer as he signaled to one of the soldiers who was contemplating the scene.”

I exchanged a quick look with Joseph. Unperturbed, he took the amphora and removed the clay lid which sealed it. The mercenary took charge of the container and filled a small brass ladle. After sniffing the contents, he brought the pink liquid to his lips and drank it. The centurion considered the test passed and requested us to hand over our weapons. The man from Arimathea explained that we were men of peace and therefore, did not carry swords. Without giving too much heed to the venerable man’s words, the officer ordered the two sentinels to search our attire. Once they had patted our sides, waists, chests, and arms, the sentries shook their heads.

Suddenly the conscientious officer stared at my staff.

“You must leave that under the guard’s care,” he told me.

And before I could react, one of the Romans snatched “Moses’ staff” away. My heart flipped over. This had not been foreseen. Regardless of how the wooden cylinder had been prepared to support the most violent encounters and shaking, the very idea that it could be lost or damaged caused me to sink into a state of deep apprehension. Moreover, it meant I could not film the interview with Pontius Pilate. It was obvious the centurion was unwilling to let me in with the walking stick. If I truly wanted to carry on with the Trojan Horse mission, I had to concede and trust in fortune.

I kept quiet as I tried not to put too much importance on my staff. To do otherwise would raise suspicions and reservations neither of which was desirable on this unrepeatable opportunity. The centurion made a gesture with his hand that indicated we were to follow him. We exited the vaulted tunnel and entered a spacious square courtyard that was open to the sky. One of its sides measured about five meters and the floor was paved with one-meter square hard limestone slabs.

Countless doors crowned by wooden lintels formed arches at the halfway point and lined both sides, beneath many porticos, which were supported by colonnades. Consistent with my verification, this fortress had been built very carefully. The large courtyard led to the barracks, the stables, and some warehouses where numerous soldiers came and went.

The centurion escorted us across the courtyard that surrounded a circular fountain with a beautiful life sized representation of the goddess Roma carved out of stone in its center. The statue appeared dressed in a tunic with multiple folds that left the goddess’ right breast uncovered. She held a lance in her right hand and a sphere, which sprouted a stream of water in her left hand. This flow was stored in the circular reservoir, which formed the lower base of the fountain. Many soldiers from the Roman cavalry were washing and brushing half a dozen horses.

Unlike the members of the infantry, the equestrians wore a short purple jacket with long sleeves and very tight fitting red pants that extended to their shins.

Contrary to what happens, for example, in our western armies, none of the soldiers stood at attention or saluted the centurion as he passed by them. He continued walking to the far end of the courtyard with his *utis* branch or rod in his right hand and his toga or loose purple cloak draped over his left arm. To the right, left, and especially under the arcades, other infantry soldiers were busy cleaning their sandals or weapons. In one corner, a large group of soldiers was crowded in a circle around something happening on the pavement. Despite my curiosity, I could not draw near them.

The officer maintained a good pace as he moved towards the staircase, which was now visible at the end of the courtyard, without looking to his left or right. Before we left that area, my attention was called to another scene. To our right, a Roman stood motionless on the flagstones, holding a heavy sack on his back at the nape of his neck. The heavy load forced the soldier to keep his head and torso slightly bent towards the ground. Another soldier with the usual attire and regulation weapons stood beside him not losing sight of his companion. On my return from the interview with the Roman governor, I would have a complete explanation for all of this...”

No sooner had I stepped on the polished white marble staircase, which began at the edge of the courtyard, did I sense that we were entering an exclusive part of the building. This staircase—which barely had a pitch line—led us to a type of rectangular vestibule lined with the finest marble, which judging from its delicate blue grey veins—must have been imported from Cyprus and Carrara by Herod the Great. There was a set of double doors nearly five meters wide and elaborately carved with palm trees, flowers, cherubs, at the top of the staircase that opened onto the first level of Antonia’s Tower. Here again I could see the expertise of the artisans and builders, possibly Phoenician, who undertook the construction of the fortress.

One guard from the infantry stood at each side of the double doors so that their blades of their *pila* crossed to form an X in front of the entrance. The centurion addressed one of them; I assume it was to advise him that we were on the list of audiences for Pontius Pilate. Seconds after turning and round raising his arm in a sign of salute, the soldier disappeared down the stairs. Evidently, we had to wait.

Joseph walked to one side of the hall and sat in an X-shaped, backless chair with a leather seat situated on a fluffy Babylonian rug. Behind him, the bright light and a cool breeze from the north entered the two slender bare windows. I endeavored to imitate my companion as I concentrated on fixing the most salient details of this room into my memory. There were two sets of sculptures, one per panel, on both sides of the doorway. The ones closest to the sentries were busts carved out of same type of white marble. If I identified them correctly, they were replicas of the Amazons who are now kept in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. However, I could not name the busts. Being unable to contain my intense desire to know, I asked Joseph about the significance of the heads set on those magnificent cylindrical pedestals. The Arimathean made a gesture of disgust and almost reluctantly told me they were busts of the Caesar. The one to the left of the door depicted Tiberius as an adolescent. The other, represented the Emperor today.

“Some years ago,” Joseph continued, “these statutes were the cause for great pain and grief for my people.”

According to the elder’s testimony, no sooner had Pontius Pilate arrived in Judea, did he use the cover of night to place these images in Jerusalem. The Jewish people would not accept the

presence of images, not even those of the Roman Emperor, so this incited a revolt. Thousands of Hebrews went to Caesarea, the capital of the invaders, and pleaded for the governor to remove the statues out of respect for the Jewish nation's traditions and beliefs. Even so, Pilate did not pay attention to them; he refused to remove the images of Tiberius. So the Jews remained around the palace for five day and five nights. In view of the situation, Pontius summoned the crowd. When everyone believed the Roman governor was ready to concede, the troops surrounded them. The Roman warned them that if they did not accept the images, the three squadrons would tear them apart.

At Pilate's order, the mercenaries drew their swords. The members of the distraught crowd fell with their faces to the ground moaning and shouting that they preferred to die than to see their Holy City profaned. Pilate—touched and awed by this attitude—ended by relenting and ordering the bust of Caesar to be removed from Jerusalem and transferred to a room in the general Roman barracks in Antonia's Tower. Without being able to help it, I left my seat and slowly walked to the first bust, but the childish face with the perfectly cut bangs over its forehead did not tell me anything. Then I went to the second effigy. As I passed in front of the sentries, both of them followed me with their eyes.

The second bust depicted Tiberius as an adult when he was about fifty years old. The emperor was declared Caesar in the year 14 when he was 55 years old. He was extremely favored. During my training for this mission and for this interview, I had received exhaustive information about Tiberius' character and personality¹. These followed the logical guidelines for artists of that era, which hid the defects of the persons who were immortalized in bronze or stone. Neither the multiple ulcers which covered his face, nor his baldness, nor the slight deviation of his nose to the right, nor the defect in his left ear, which was more detached from his head than the one on the right, appeared. (The latter two defects appeared clearly in a bust from Mahon that was made when Tiberius was no longer emperor.) Yes, one can observe a fallen mouth, which is a consequence of missing teeth. As an exception to these "concessions", the sculptor had created this introverted and controversial Caesar's head precisely with a triangular face, wide forehead, and a short sharp pointed chin. In summary, this bust emanated the resentful, shy, philanthropic air which characterized Tiberius, who was going to play a decisive role in the governor of Judea's decision at the time of saving or condemning Jesus of Nazareth. (Even so, we will let these events be until they talk for themselves)

Suddenly the door opened. Joseph and I hurried to the threshold. The soldiers pulled back their lances as if they were operated by a spring mechanism and allowed an individual to pass who was dressed in a Roman toga of the common plebian. I scarcely had time to set eyes on him, when the centurion opened one leaf of the double doors. He held a waxed tablet which was identical to the one I had seen at the guard's station. He announced our names and, with a smile, invited us to enter.

The fact that the salon was more spacious than the vestibule perplexed me. It was oval with cedar-lined walls. The cypress wood floor creaked beneath our feet as we always approached the far end of the room where a short man waited. It was Pontius Pilate. When the

¹ My documentation about Tiberius was essentially based on four sources: *The Annals* by Tacitus, *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius, and *Roman Histories* by Cassius Dio and *History of Rome* by Velleius Paterculus. To this bibliography I added an infinite amount of documents, data and books by F. Josephus, Philo, Juvenal, Ovid, Pliny the Elder, Seneca, Henting, Bernoulli, Barbagallo, baring-Gould, Ferrero, marsh, Ciaceri, Mommsen, Marañón, Homo, Pippitt, Axel Munthe, Ramsey, Tarver, Tuxen, and a long etcetera [Major's note].

governor saw us, he rose from his seat and hailed us with his arm held high just as people would do to Hitler many centuries later.

After that, Joseph bowed his head slightly when we were next to the table and proceeded to introduce me. I instinctively repeated this delicate sign of reverence as I felt how the governor of Judas' bulging blue eyes pierced through me¹. Pontius returned to his seat and invited us to sit down. However, the centurion continued to stand beside a simple but expensive cedar table with ivory feet. He was not wearing his helmet, but he was bearing his regulation weapons, namely his sword on his left side (the opposite of rank and file troops), a dagger, and his chain mail coat, of course. With the exception of his cloak, his attire was similar to that of the mercenaries.

Meanwhile, the revered Arimathea was speaking in Greek as he offered the amphora of wine to Pilate—whose eyes did not cease looking me over—I must note that the curiosity was mutual. Honestly, the image I had conceived of the man was far from reality. I was disappointed in his size as he was barely 1.5 meters tall. The governor was stout with a prominent belly that he tried to conceal beneath folds and pleats of a dusky violet colored silk toga, which draped over his left shoulder, wrapped around and fastened at his chest. A white silk tunic with delicate gold brocade shone from under Pontius' top layer. It went down to his ankles and up a short, thick collar.

From the onset, I was surprised at his hair. Although I could not confirm it, I was almost certain he had resorted to a false hairpiece to hide his baldness. The exaggerated arrangement of his particular hairpiece so that it fell in a studied manner over his forehead and the obvious contrast with the long hair that hung over the nape of his neck in the shape of a mane, betrayed the presence of a blonde wig. Gradually, in conformance with my increasing knowledge of the governor, I observed how he exerted himself almost to morbidity, in order to imitate everything about his Emperor. This hairpiece appeared to be another proof of this.

According to all of the historians, baldness was one of the traits of the Claudii. Tiberius, who had lost his hair when he was not far from being a juvenile, evidently blonde wigs, which as Ovid alleged, were constructed with the hair from slaves or prisoners from the barbaric villages. Other emperors, such as Julius Caesar and Caligula also exhibited this malady. Seneca masterfully described the reason for Caligula's grave countenance as a consequence of his baldness. As the Spanish say, 'It was a crime to look at his head...' I took it for granted that to protect my health; I must gaze at his hairpiece as little as possible...

Rampant decay had decimated his teeth and the black spots sprinkled over his face made its white swollen surface—which was round as a shield—even more disagreeable. Since Pontius was conscious of this problem, he had attempted to improve on his dentures by adding two gold teeth : one in the top row and one in the bottom. Moreover, this prosthetic device was an indicator of his privileged economic status as well. Pilate knew this. I noticed that even when there was no reason for it, he enjoyed smiling and showing "his powers"². Despite his extremely close shave and the perfume he applied, his overall appearance was minimally pleasant.

¹ Those bulging eyes as well as the collection of the rest of Plate's features: obesity, short height, facial swelling, etc. would have made any doctor suspect a thyroid gland disorder (possibly hyperthyroidism) [Major's note].

² Contrary to the findings of several researchers, the prefect Pontius Pilate had never been a freed slave. He came from a very old and noble family which had been established in the Roman equestrian order since the fourth century before Christ. One of his ancestors, Pontius Cominius, participated in the Camillus War against the Gauls. This ancestor was assigned the extremely daring task of covertly entering Rome in a

I also believe Pontius Pilate's physical description fit one of Ernest Kretschmer's typological classifications. At least from an external point of view, he matched the pyknic type. But what really interested me was his way of being. It was vital to delve into his spirit with the aim of attaining the best understanding of his motivations and extract a certain categorical conclusion about his behavior on Friday April 7.

The governor thanked Joseph for the gift and, falling on me and snickering he inquired, "How is the Little Old Man?"

I knew the rough character and the extreme seriousness of Tiberius in his youth had earned him this appellation. I tried to respond without losing my calm.

"On my trip to the eastern province, I had the honor of seeing him return to the Island of Capri. His health continues to deteriorate as rapidly as your mood..."

"Oh!" he exclaimed as he pretended he was unaware of this news. "So he's back in Capri?"

This ending alerted me. With it and the following questions, Pilate endeavored to determine if I was a member of the group of astrologers who surrounded Tiberius and whom Juvenal ironically characterized years later as a "Chaldean flock". My luck was cast. Now I strived to go with the flow. As a standard precautionary measure, the Trojan Horse project had decided I would have a constant auditory connection with the module during my meeting with Pilate. Auxiliary information from *Santa Claus*, the onboard computer, could be very useful. For that reason, I kept my right hand permanently stuck to my ear in simulation of a problem in hearing my interlocutor. In fact, as I explained earlier, this sophistry enabled Eliseo to hear the voices of those present clearly...

small boat made from tree bark. His true name originated from a community by the name Samnite. Two hundred years later two other famous Pontia emerged in Roman history: Caius Pontius Telesinus and his father Gaius Pontius Herennius who was a friend of Plato. All of the historians claim that Pontius Pilate's family was divided into four large branches, the Telesinus, Cominius, Fregellanus, and Aufidianus. All of these adopted the name of the place where the family originated. Without a doubt, Telesinus was the noblest and most distinguished branch. It proceeded from Gaius Pontius, a lieutenant of Gaius Marius in the war in Spain at the time of Sulla. Although Pontius Telesinus was the most famous, he put Sulla in a considerable predicament and for Marius his death was a sign of defeat. After that, Pontius Telesinus disappeared from Roman history, nonetheless, two important poets Martial and Juvenal mention him. One as bad, and the other, who had a great appreciation for him, as good. It is difficult to ascertain exactly which of the two important branches Pontius Pilate belonged to; however, given his rank and responsibility, everyone assumes it was from the Telesinus. "Pilate" was nothing but a nickname or an agnomen as was the case with other illustrious personages: Cicero, Torquatus, Corvus, etc. It means "skilled with the pilum". Presumably, it was related to some significant feat with weapons that occurred in Pontius' family. For example, in the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, the Pontia were supporters of the former and performed various great heroic deeds that won them a great friendship with Caesar. Yet other members of the family remained loyal to the Republic. This was the case with Lucius Pontius Aquila who was a friend of Cicero. In Tiberius's time, the consul's fasces was carried by Gaius Petronius Pontius Nigrinus and another Pontius—Fregellanus—held the Senate's receipts. Much later Pontius Fregellanus fell into disgrace when he joined forces with the feared General Sejanus. However, the Pontius family did not lose its prestige in any of these circumstances. Under Emperor Nero, another Pontius Telesinus acted as consul with Gaius Suetonius Paulinus. In summary, Pontius "Pilate" belonged to the Roman equestrian class, which is the second-class nobility [Major's note].

“I understand this news came to you after some delay,” I dissembled, “and you were not informed about the Emperor’s voluntary retirement to Capri. He is staying there with the great Thrasyllus who is his friend and astrology teacher.”

Pontius did not give up. This delicate situation seemed to amuse him.

“Then,” replied the prefect without abandoning that false smile, “he brought along his personal physician...”

Pilate’s new trap did not bear fruit. I knew Antonius Musa had been the personal doctor of his predecessor Augustus. Yet how could I correct the supreme chief of the Roman forces in Judea without offending his twisted spirit?

“No, governor. I know Tiberius admired the way Musa cared for his stepfather, but the Emperor preferred to take the no less wise and eminent Charicles. According to my information, from time to time Tiberius called him to any one of the twelve villas where he lived in Capri.”

Pilate began to fidget with the small marble phallus that hung around his neck. Through this accessory, which was so common in Imperial Rome, I saw the demonstration of something I suspected: this Roman was deeply superstitious. The phallus was an adornment on all types of items, such as necklaces, rings, furniture, pictures, etc. Its use was motivated by cautious Romans to attract good fortune and avoid misfortune¹.

“Yes,” he murmured in a somewhat depreciatory tone. “Tiberius has always been a sickly man. And everyone suffers from his irritability at times. Jason, I suppose he will grow increasingly weaker...”

These comments were partially true, but new attacks on my profession as a supposed astrologer and my knowledge of Caesar were hidden in between these half-truths.

So I responded, “I can assure you that Tiberius retains all of his strength. As you well know, he can puncture a green apple with his fingers. Neither his strength nor his vision has diminished in his old age (Tiberius was 73 years old in the year 30) I am sure this is in agreement with your opinion. The Emperor is a tormented man on account of his destiny. He will never forget his grand love: Vipsania. His mother Livia’s possessive and ambitious character and those repulsive sores that disfigure his face ended up turning him into a timid, resentful, withdrawn man.”

(At that instant Eliseo interrupted to communicate to me that in the *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder specifically mentioned that Tiberius was the man with the best eyesight in the world. He was able to see in the dark—like an owl—yet he suffered from myopia in the daylight.

¹ The profusion of phalluses in those times went to the extent that they could be found on doors of houses or bedrooms. When they were placed in gardens and fields, they could protect against evil ghosts. If they were set at the crossroads, they showed travelers the appropriate direction. *Fascinum* were also hung from the emperor’s victorious chariots and the necks of pregnant women who desired an easy childbirth. The Romans came to believe the power of the phallus charm was augmented if it was also given claws or wings. Clappers have also been found in the shape of clappers. The Roman superstition about these is that the sound from these phallic shaped “bells” would drive away witches and all types of spirits. Only in the decaying Empire was the custom so degraded that the phallus was transformed into a symbol of pleasure. In early Rome, young newlyweds offered their virginity to Hermes’ phallus as a token of their devout intentions. Much later the phallus of god served as a comforter to many vicious women [Major’s note].

According to Dio's *Roman History*, this was one of the reasons he gave for not accepting the empire.)

"Timid, resentful, withdrawn, and cruel," Pilate finished as he exchanged glances with his centurion.

My conclusion was that the governor must have been satisfied with my representation. From that moment, his questions and comments were not so venomous. Moreover, this statement started to throw light on Pontius' behavior with respect to the Emperor, especially his personal opinion in regard to Tiberius and his actions. On the one side, which I had the opportunity to confirm; Pontius Pilate liked to imitate his Caesar. On the other, he hated and feared him with equal intensity.

These last years with Tiberius shortly before his retirement to Capri were absolute terror. Suetonius described it as follows: "the denunciations which descended under Tiberius deprived the country of complete peace more than all of the civil wars." He spied on everyone and everything could be motivated by a secret betrayal of Caesar. Tiberius' suspicious personality fed—and not just a little—this wave of denunciations. When a brave man such as Calpurnius Piso raised his voice in protest of the situation, Caesar demanded that he be annihilated. Tiberius saw traitors and treason among his closet friends and collaborators.

The Tiberian Terror went to such an extreme that, according to an anecdote by Suetonius, "the monitoring included a word that escaped in a moment of drunkenness or the most innocent joke could constitute a pretext for a denunciation." This grave situation, which in my opinion, had enormous significance for Pilate's behavior at the time of his judgment of Jesus of Nazareth—was perfectly drawn in an incident featuring Paul, a praetor who attended a meal.

As Seneca relates the story in his work, *On Benefits*: This Paul wore a cameo ring with a portrait of Caesar Tiberius on it in relief. His good fellow, Paul, who was compelled by a physiological necessity, commented on the imprudence of grasping a urinal with the hand which wore the ring. Maro who was one of the most infamous informers of the period observed this fact. Yet when Paul's slave warned him that an informer was spying on him, he quickly took advantage of the intoxication and removed the ring from his finger at the exact time that Maro was taking the diners' testimony about the injustice being done to the emperor by bringing his effigy to a urinal. At that instant, the slave opened his hand and displayed the ring. This saved careless Paul from a certain death and a total loss of his possessions—which in obedience to Tiberius' law, would always stop in the hands of the spy. This, and old hatreds, were the most common cause for all accusations.

Of course, Pontius Pilate knew about these events and would fear—as would any other Roman citizen—being the target of the myriad of professional or amateur informers who swarmed around then. At the particular time that I was present, there was a sense that Pilate was not exactly a coward. The feat of representing Caesar in a province as unruly and difficult as Judea, presupposed, at least theoretically, a man with a singular temperament¹.

¹ A writer from Alexandria writes of Pilate: His character is hard and inflexible without any consideration. The writer from Alexandria indicates that Pontius' government was characterized by its "corruption, violence, offenses, brutality, continual convictions without due process, and boundless cruelty" [Major's note].

Although it was a political error, it was well demonstrated by his refusal to remove Caesar's images from Jerusalem and his appropriation the Temple's treasury to construct an aqueduct. In honor of the truth, I believe that this individual could feel fear, as he did would do so on that upcoming Friday. He feared the situation he had suffered those years in the empire. He did not fear the truth that arises cleanly and directly between two men. Pilate stood before me as an emotionally unstable man, but not as a coward, which was what he always pretended to be. (This, as we will see much later, is another concept that should be reviewed especially by the Catholic Church.)¹

"Timid, resentful, withdrawn, and cruel," the governor repeated while he was immersed in his inscrutable thoughts.

Silence fell like a parcel into the room. Joseph seemed not to give much credit to what he was hearing. He only shifted nervously in the leather chair. The same violent silence must have pulled Pilate out of the depths of his mind for he adopted a more conciliatory tone and asked the question again.

"But tell me Jason, what is the Emperor doing now? What does he do...?"

"Like I said, I understand that Tiberius has escaped from Rome...fleeing by himself."

I deliberately paused. Pontius' eyes glittered; he nodded his head...

I continued, "Your mortal enemy either resented or lacked your generosity. And the stars," I slipped in intentionally, "announced events that should shake the empire. Now he walks alone, as always, over the steep cliffs of Capri. He doesn't speak to anyone except his astrologers and I can assure you that his distrust and senile instability are such that even my colleagues are murdered."

"He's killing his astrologers?" the governor interrupted with a grin of disbelief.

Apparently, this news still had not reached in remote Palestine. So I endeavored to make good use of it.

"It is so. His dementia is compromising him to all of those who knew about it. Tiberius receives an astrologer every afternoon. He does this in the tallest of the twelve villas that he ordered built on the island and which, as you know, are dedicated to each of the twelve gods. Well, if the Emperor believes the astrologer on duty has not revealed the truth in his predictions, then he orders the robust slave who accompanies him to throw the man over a sheer cliff after he returns to the palace."

Pilate smiled maliciously, pointing his index finger at me and demanding without subterfuge, "And you? Why are you still alive?"

"I strive to follow my teacher, Thrasyllus' advice and I am led by my own heart. Which is to say: I tell the Emperor the truth..."

¹ Farther on, as a result of our second "jump" in time, I would have the need to modify this very agreeable assessment of "emotionally unstable". In reality, Pontius was demented... [Major's note].

(Then Eliseo read some text to me containing a legend that circulated in that era that—if true—was an example of Tiberius’ previously mentioned strength of character, ‘When Thrasyllus was summoned by Caesar to predict the future, he paled. Nonetheless, he valiantly warned him that he was threatened by a great danger. Tiberius was so comforted by this loyalty that he kissed Thrasyllus and made him his foremost astrologer.’) Pilate could not contain his curiosity.

“And which one of these events—according to you—will shake the entire Empire?”

“We have read the stars. They augur a very serious incident that will affect everyone, especially the Emperor...”

These are the moments that I enjoyed the enormous advantage of knowing history. We were in the year 30 and I tried to focus my “forecasts” on the immediate future.

“Continue! Continue!” Pontius pressed me as he, symbolically pushing me with his short, plump hands with pink finger on which the onyx seal of his leadership stood out.

“Sejanus....”

When he heard this name pronounced by me with well-studied histrionics, he went pale. At that time—particularly after Caesar had retired to Capri in 26 AD—Aelius Sejanus was the head commander of the Roman praetorian forces, Tiberius’ confidant, and the real “emperor”. This general’s poorly disguised ambition and his influence over Tiberius had become a second horror for the citizens of the Empire. His power was such that his image came to appear next to Caesar’s in the places of honor in the city, on the legion’s insignia and even on the currency¹.

His true intention, which was to replace Tiberius as emperor, led him into all sorts of excesses, intrigues, and assassinations. He also plotted to marry one of Tiberius’ grandchildren (probably Germanicus’ daughter Julia Livilla). However, the Caesar led him along, encouraging him and then ultimately truncating Sejanus’ aspiration for erasing his obscure lineage and humble birth. Being a cold calculating man himself, Tiberius’ lieutenant eliminated the Emperor’s possible successors, initiating a brutal offensive against Agrippina (Augustus’ granddaughter) and his children (Nero I, Drusus III, Gaius—who was better known as Caligula, Agrippina II, Drusilla, and Julia Livilla). Two prestigious representatives from Agrippina’s side commenced Sejanus’ attacks: Silius and Sabinus. The former, who was a great military man, committed suicide in the year 24 AD to avoid execution, while the trial and subsequent murder of the latter in the year 28 AD, plunged Rome and its provinces into anguish. Tacitus confirms these events. ‘Never,’ he states, ‘did consternation and fear reign as they did in Rome.’

Pontius Pilate and the centurion with him, knew very well who Sejanus was and of his power. The aforementioned history and the Catholic Church would have explained to the world—or at least have them believe—the fatal influence that was exercised over the entire Empire precisely in these crucial years under Tiberius first minister. Only in this way—with an understanding of Sejanus’ despotic, iron government and the Caesar’s no less vicious attitude—

¹ The Trojan Horse team verified this last instance by finding that the image of Sejanus did in fact appear on money in the Spanish city of Bilbilis (actually Calatayud in the Zaragoza province). According to Suetonius some of the legions stationed in Syria did not accept this glorification of Sejanus. When the “strong man” fell, Tiberius rewarded them in spite of himself being the one who had order the glorification of his lieutenant [Major’s note].

could one begin to sense why Pilate was going to “wash his hands” during the proceedings against the Teacher from Galilee.

All of the governors of the Roman provinces—and we are not mentioning Pontius—knew their posts and their lives hung from a simple thread. The smallest scandal, gossip, or accusation could bring them irremissible destitution, exile, or execution. If we examine the Roman prefect of Judea in his time—before the Jews who threatened to report him to Caesar for allowing one of the Hebrews to proclaim himself “king”—he preferred to yield in order to avoid a confrontation with the implacable Sejanus or with Tiberius, who was even more intransigent... Hence, in respect to the given social and political circumstances in the year 30, Pilate’s behavior was not cowardly, but “diplomatic prevention” with a high dose of insanity. I believe there was a clear difference between both ends—yet this still did not justify the decision that was made for this representative of Caesar (or in this case Sejanus), but it does aid in understanding it better.

“What do the auguries have to do with him?” Pilate inquired contemptuously.

The Trojan Horse had weighted this interview meticulously and General Curtiss’ team had foreseen that in my attempt to win his confidence and friendship, and mostly importantly obtain the maximum ease of movement inside Antonia’s Fortress for Friday morning, it was unadvisable to warn Pontius Pilate about Sejanus’ tragic end in the year 31. If the governor came to firmly believed in this “prophecy” (which would be fulfilled on October 18 of the said year), his fear of Sejanus might partially disappear, thereby changing his decision to execute Jesus. Logically, this went counter to the project’s most fundamental ethics. We were mere observers and any maneuvers that would cause an alternation of history were rigorously prohibited. This is why I was restricted to only revealing part of the truth.

“The stars,” I said adopting a solemn air, “are favorably disposed toward Sejanus. His power will increase when he is appointed to the consul¹.”

Just as I expected, Pilate granted credit to my auguries. As soon as he heard my “predictions”, he left the table and stood facing the huge window located at the end of the salon’s arch. He remained there for several minutes with his hands behind his back and his head tilted slightly forward.

“So it’s the consul...,” he whispered abruptly.

And without looking back, he asked me to proceed.

“But this is not the most serious thing”, I added as I stared at the centurion. “The stars indicate a grave conspiracy against the Emperor.”

I could not continue. Pilate turned around and struck me with his glare.

“Does Tiberius know this?”

¹ Indeed, Tiberius had announced Sejanus’ appointment to the consul that very year 30. Nonetheless, it seems news from Rome needed more than three months to reach Palestine. The designation had been planned for the next year (31), but Caesar’s “hard” man would die before he could flaunt the said position. At that time Pilate was not aware of all of this, hence his surprise [Major’s note].

“My teacher, Thrasyllus, took responsibility for announcing it to him shortly before my departed from Capri.”

“Well,” he ruminated, “the Syrian cohorts are restless because of Sejanus...but it does not take an astrologer to expect that one day or another—”

“It is in the stars,” I interrupted using the full extent of my persuasive faculties, “which have disclosed a name...”

Pilate said nothing. He gathered up his long tunic and sat down very slowly without ceasing to observe me. I glanced at the centurion and feigned distrust at the presence of this officer, but Pontius, who caught my attitude, hasten to calm me.

“Don’t be afraid. Civilis is my *primipilus*¹. The entire legion is under his command. You may speak with complete freedom.”

Here Pontius concluded with a gesture expressing that the room where we were did not have ingenuously prepared holes like the ones that were present with the naïve Sabinus². I pretended to have absolute confidence in my interlocutor’s sentences and resumed.

“Sejanus—”

“Is a bastard?” pre-empted the governor bursting into resounding laughter³.

¹ This centurion, according to the definition Pilate used, was the “first” centurion of the sixty centuries that constituted a legion. In this perfectly hierarchical Roman practice, the so called *primorum ordinum* centurions or abbreviated *primi ordines* were the centurions of the highest class in a legion. The *primipilus* or the centurion who was chosen as the highest-ranking officer of all sixty centuries also participated in the court martial [Major’s note].

² The prefect was up to date with the holes employed by the collaborators of the fearful Sejanus in order to accuse Sabinus, who was loyal to Agrippina, and executed in the year 28. Four ex-praetors who aspired to the consul, plotted to ingratiate themselves with Sejanus by capturing Sabinus in the act. It involved Latinius Latiaris, Porcius Cato, Petilius Rufus, and Opsius. The first of these pretended to be friend and confidant of the unhappy Sabinus. He agitated him with criticisms of Sejanus, antagonized him with Tiberius’ deep aversion for his friend Germanicus’ (Agrippina’s husband), and shared his feelings about Caesar and his minister. On the arranged day, Latiaris brought the victim to his house and provoked his loquacity against Caesar and his favorite. Sabinus’ was ignorant of the three other accomplices who were listening from the attic through a few holes made in the floor. A little while later, Sabinus’ violent declarations were in Tiberius’ and Sejanus’ possession. They subsequently ordered his execution [Major’s note].

³ I admit we were confused by this outburst and the prefect’s general attitude toward Sejanus. Eliseo as well as I knew Pontius Pilate had been charged, perhaps by the general and Tiberius’ favorite, with the premeditated intention to incite the Jewish population. Sejanus had been one of the men who was most distinguished by his hatred for the Hebrews who lived in Rome. Shortly before Christ’s death, the emperor ordered the expulsion of four thousand Jews who were relocated to the island of Sardinia in order to eliminate the bands of brigands who had established general quarters there. This massive banishment was propitiated in good measure on the counsel of Sejanus. Its root cause was the embezzlement of funds by four Hebrews who had been responsible for the recent conversion of Fulvia (the wife of senator Saturnius) to Judaism and the transport of her valuable gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem. However, these Jews kept the presents and Sejanus who was the commander of the praetorian guard, took the opportunity to report this incident to Tiberius. This infuriated him and, as I said, he ordered all of the Jews and converts to be expelled from Rome. This was actually the first persecution of the Jews in the west [Major’s note].

Here was one of those brusque changes of character. Pilate hit the table with his fist, making the perfectly folded parchments, papyrus piled on a tray jump. Some of these documents or letters were written on the skins of goats, calves, or sheep, which the Romans called “membranes” rolled along the table and fell at the officer’s feet. He rushed to retrieve them, while the prefect who was nervous and evidently confused, clutched his marble phallic amulet.

“Are you sure?” Pontius stammered.

Yet before I had the chance to reply, Pilate regarded the centurion and asked me the question again.

“What do you know?”

The officer shook his head without moving his lips.

“A conspiracy against Tiberius...?”

Actually, Pilate was talking to himself. Now in a reflective mood, he brought his fingers to his face, caressing it. Finally, as he raised his eyes to the roof; he questioned me as if to catch me in an error.

“Let me see if I understand this...Astrology says the gods are on Sejanus’ side. Yet you just finished by announcing that a plot was being prepared against Caesar. If that were true and now you say Tiberius is informed, how is it possible that the head of the praetorians continues to enjoy the Emperor’s trust? Answer!”

Pilate turned and glared into my face with a ferocity that made Joseph of Arimathea tremble, but I held his stare. Just as I had foreseen, he bit the hook. So with all the care I was capable of, I embarked on the real reason why I came.

“There is a plot...”

Pontius was appeased. Now I was certain my imperturbable serenity had disarmed him.

“Speak!”

“But before that,” I replied, “I would like to ask you for a small favor...”

“Granted! But speak!”

“You know, in addition to my study of astrology, I am a wood merchant. Very good, well a rich Roman citizen from Thessalonica knows of a marvelous underground heating system which Augustus ordered to be constructed beneath the floor of his *inclinium* (imperial dining room) All of Rome is aware of your exquisite taste and that you put a similar system under your *triclinium* I have received the express assignment, and I highly recommend that you consult my Greek friend, if you consider it prudent, to collect some technical details about the installation. I bear a letter in which he requests that you allow me to do some consulting in this respect.”

I immediately retrieved a small parchment roll from my oilskin bag. It had been meticulously sealed and manufactured by the Trojan Horse team¹. I gave it to Pilate, who to tell the truth, was still astonished. Once he read the message from my nonexistent friend, he let it fall on the table. He was visibly pleased by so much adulation.

“I didn’t know they knew about this in Rome.”

I nodded and smiled.

“Well, granted. Tomorrow you can ask all of the questions you see fit—”

“Tomorrow, honorable governor,” I interrupted, “I cannot come to Antonia’s Fortress, but I can come on Friday.”

“Say no more—Friday it is.”

“I do not wish to abuse your consideration,” I forced in, “but you know how difficult it is to gain access to your residence. Could you furnish me with an order or a pass for safe conduct which would facilitate my work?”

Pontius began to lose his patience. With a gesture of repugnance, he motioned for the centurion to bring him one of the rolls that lined a wide built in shelf behind the officer. From a quick perusal, it must have contained a hundred long rolls. The prefect straightened the papyrus, grabbed a bronze quill, and scribbled a series of sentences on it in Latin with nearly square handwriting.

“Here you are,” he remarked, a bit annoyed as I accepted the order. “On Friday, when you present this authorization, you must ask for Civilis. And now for the sake of all the gods, tell me again!”

“Bravo!”

This exclamation from Eliseo, my partner in the module, helped me to recover my enthusiasm.

“That is as much as I am going to relate,” I responded in a lowered tone of voice. “it’s extremely secret. Only the Emperor and some of his intimate friends in Capri, which includes my friend Thrasyllus, know of this. I hope your proverbial discretion knows how to guard and administer as much as I am going to reveal to you. As I said, Tiberius is not unaware of his plot. He knows as well as you do, about Sejanus’ intrigues and his responsibility for the murders and the exile of Agrippina and her sons. Therefore he has given private orders for Antonia² and his grandson Caligula to travel to Capri where he will have them under his protection.”

¹ The Trojan Horse team had made the parchment by following the ancient techniques used by the specialists in Pergamon, which in northeastern Asia Minor. They used a section of lamb’s skin. After removing the hair by scraping, they treated it with high pressure lime water to eliminate the fat. Next they dried it and then, without outer skin, rubbed it with chalk dust and polished it with a pumice stone. The Latin script was written in the capitalis rustica font based on tall, slender elegant lettering [Major’s note].

² In order to have the best comprehension of the internal struggles, which pummeled the final years of Tiberius’ empire more than anything else did, I want to recount the main members of the famous Claudius family. In the first generation: Tiberius Claudius Nero married Livia and they had Tiberius (emperor) and Drusus I who was suspected to be the son of Livia and Emperor Augustus. In the second generation: the

Pontius Pilate was left open-mouthed as if he had seen a ghost. Finally, he almost stuttered until he was able to express himself.

“Caligula! Of course Tiberius’ grandson: Little Boots¹!”

“Then if the Caesar’s plans are fulfilled,” I stated addressing myself to the head centurion, “you can already imagine who will be his successor.”

Just then, as if all of this produced extreme mental confusion on his part, he returned to interrogating me.

“But what do the stars say about Tiberius’ life? Will he last much longer?”

My reply—as intended—docked the prefect’s incipient excitement, which seemed to dream of the disappearance of the cruel and rigid Tiberius.

“Long enough for plenty of blood to still run...”

(Obviously I knew Caesar’s death would not occur until the year 37.) Suddenly one of the servants erupted into the oval room to announce that lunch was about to start, thus curtailing that conversation. I honestly gave a sigh of relief. Yet Pilate, who was exhilarated and grateful for my revelations, invited us to join him. Joseph and I looked at each other. The Arimathean, who had not opened his mouth throughout the interview—agreed with gusto. (I did not suspect that, thanks to this invitation, our departure from Antonia’s Fortress was postponed, so I had the occasion to witness an event that was extremely illustrative in my attainment of a better understanding of the obscure episode wherein the guards fled from the tomb where Jesus of Nazareth was interred.)

Somewhat more relaxed, the four of us were led toward the extreme opposite side of the building from the interview had been held. Pontius lightly passed by as we were conducted to a secluded *triclinium*, which was separated from the official “office” by a few transparent muslin curtains. The speed with which we had been introduced into the oval room and the circumstances of all that had happened during that time had transpired in the north sector, which was behind everything else. This had prevented me from thoroughly observing it. My mission on that coming Friday morning required me to know the layout as precisely as possible.

children of Tiberius Claudius Nero and Livia (stepchildren of Augustus): Tiberius (emperor) who married Vipsania and had Drusus II. After he married Julia I, he had a son who died in infancy. Drusus I married Antonia I and had Germanicus, Claudius (who was an emperor) and Livilla. In the third generation (children of Tiberius and Vipsania): Drusus II married Livilla and had Julia III and the twins Germanicus Gemellus and Tiberius Gemellus. In the third generation (II) children of Drusus I and Antonia II and therefore nieces and nephew of Tiberius and grand children of Augustus: Germanicus, Claudius (emperor) and Livilla. In the fourth generation (children of Drusus II and Livilla and therefore Tiberius’ grandchildren and nephews, nieces and great grandchildren to Augustus): Julia III, Germanicus Gemellus, and Tiberius Gemellus. In the fourth generation (II), the children of Germanicus and Agrippina I and therefore Tiberius’ nieces, nephews, and grandchildren, and Augustus’ great grandchildren: Nero I, Drusus III, Caius (who was better known as Caligula), Agrippina II, Drusilla, and Julia Livilla. Consequently, Antonia II was Germanicus’ mother and Caligula’s grandmother [Major’s note].

¹ This was Caligula’s nickname that was given to him by the soldiers he grew up with in Germany on account of the type of military footwear he wore [Major’s note].

Hence, to make the most of those moment, I pretended to have a special interest in a bust lodged in a large niche practically in the center of the wall that held Pilate's library. I mentally photographed as many details as I could. Pontius paused when he saw me I lagging behind. I inclined my head slightly toward the small bronze bust, recognizing with surprise that it was identical (maybe it was the same) to the one I had contemplated during my training at the Cabinet des Médailles at the National Library of France in Paris. In this bust the emperor Tiberius appears with his mouth in the Caesar's characteristic bitter grimace.

"Beautiful!" I exclaimed.

And with an ironic smile, the Roman asked, "Who? The Caesar or the bust?"

"The sculpture, of course. In my opinion," I added as I pointed to the mouth's expression, "this is one of the few which does him a certain justice."

"I like your sincerity, Jason," the governor replied as he approached and patted me on the back. "You know what? I would like to guess what history will say about this tyrant."

"This," I answered, "is it exactly: Here lies a cruel despot and a bloodthirsty tyrant."

Pontius Pilate could not imagine that I was reciting the epitaph his biographers would write on his tomb in the year 37. Nevertheless, it is also definite that this opinion was shared by the great historian Wiedermeyer, that if Tiberius had been born in the year 6 BC history would have had a very different inscription for him: Here lies a great strategist.

"Instead, I would have chiseled his favorite phrase, 'After me, fire does away with the Earth!'"

Pilate was right. Just as Seneca and Dio recollected, this was Tiberius' most repeated saying. The legion's insignia and Tiberius' zodiac sign were exactly positioned to the right and the left, respectively of the bust of Caesar on wooden feet. The first was a metallic eagle most likely cast in golden bronze with its wings extended and a bundle of arrows in its claws. The second sculpture was of a scorpion, also metallic with a brilliant golden shine. The sacred Roman insignia were mounted above two spears more than two meters long with metal tips which were made to be lodged in the Earth or in this case, in a square red wooden base.

Continuing along the same wall in this room, there was a smaller, somber door, which accessed the vestibule. It was from here that the servant appeared and I assume that way could lead to Pilate's private rooms. The rest of the room was practically empty. The total number of entrances consisted of a small dining room, which branched off from this ellipsoidal shaped room. The place must have measured about 18 meters in diameter at the top and 9 meters in diameter at its maximum width. The ceiling vaulted to a height of approximately 13 meters. To me it seemed to be a demonstration of the extreme opulence and conscientious craft Herod brought to this fortress.

Yet I was even more surprised when the curtains were separated to reveal the officer and a cascade of light inundated everything. In the spot where the twin windows stood in the other end of the room, the architects had opened the roof with a rectangular skylight that was more than three meters long on one side and was covered by a single pane of glass. When the sun was at its zenith, a torrent of light delivered a brilliant luminosity and a gentle heat into the cozy room that was profoundly pleasant. A fragrant centerpiece of citrus blossoms, almost entirely lemon and

citron, stood at the center of a linen tablecloth on circular table barely 40 centimeters high. There seemed to be a good number of feather cushions or pillows scattered on the floor around the table that were habitually used for sitting or reclining. The apse was lined with cedar wood and contained half a dozen lanterns or oil lamps that were unlit. In the area where there was nothing other than the expanse of the wall where I had contemplated the bust of Caesar, I discovered a narrow door masterfully hidden between the seams of the cedar panels.

In fact, it was through this door that the four or five slaves emerged dressed in short ivory tunics. Evidently, they came from Syria with the exception of the one with long blonde hair who was from Gaul. As the food was being passed around, Pilate confessed to me that this latter beautiful man was a “jewel.” After no small amount of haggling, he had managed to buy him from the Jerusalem slave market for nothing less than the despicable sum of 1,500 *sestertii* (about 250 silver *denarii*). Each of the servants carried an earthenware basin or a copper washing pan with a small wooden platform inside which served as a place for the feet to rest upon, thus making it a more comfortable wash. After the obligatory ritual, Pontius suggested that I leave my sandals off. He and the centurions had done so. At first I did not understand, but Pilate smiled and pointed at the wooden platform on the floor which clarified the reason for the suggestion.

“This way you will have the opportunity to experience my excellent subterranean heating system for yourself.”

When I placed my feet on top of the cypress wood, did I begin to feel a very comfortable warmth. I was honestly amazed. The circulation of the hot water that flowed under the floor emitted sufficient thermal energy to heat the room without the need for chimneys or inconvenient stoves. Naturally, since I knew little about my host’s psychology, I did not hesitate to grandly praise this “revolutionary” and ingenuous mechanism and promised to discuss it with all of the dignitaries and courtiers I had the chance to meet.

While the slaves were setting the different dishes on the table, I utilized the moments of lunch—in accordance with the custom of Roman citizens—to present both Pilate and Civilis with small emeralds that were acquired for the Trojan Horse project from the mines at Muzo¹. I have previously noted that the project has planned to simply my access to the Roman governor by means of this gift. In principle, my goal was to deliver two unique fulgent green stones—as defined by Pliny—to Pilate as a gift. However, anticipating that my freedom of movement throughout Antonia’s Fortress during my working day on Friday would be conditional on the will of the leader of the centurions, I made the decision to endeavor to win his esteem as well. And nothing would be better than to give him one of these beautiful emeralds, which were the most sought after stones in the Roman world after diamonds and pearls². It was the first and only time I

¹ I must report that the Trojan Horse team had tried all means to obtain the emeralds from the deposits in the Ural Mountains in the Soviet Union. These mines were mentioned by the historian Pliny the Elder, who lived from 23 to 79 AD, in his treatise on precious stones. He is said to have ascribed them as the purest and clearest. But the Russians raised obstacles so General Curtiss decided to change the source for the emeralds and resorted to the no less famous Colombian mines in Muzo, which are approximately 150 kilometers north of Santa Fe Bogotá. The color of these emeralds is a silkier, more velvety green than the Russian ones with a birefringence (0.0006) and a density (2.71) lower than the ones from the Ural Mountains. The Trojan Horse team acquired two hexagonal prism shaped stones which weighed 27 grams and were a sumptuous green color. The project concluded that even though the stones came from a continent, which had not been discovered in the year 30, the persons who were in power did not have the technology to find out [Major’s note].

² Since the Trojan Horse project expected a high degree of superstition from the Roman city, it especially wanted to give emeralds as this gem enjoyed a special allure. It was claimed to have curative properties

saw the outline of a fleeting smile on Civilis' stony face. In contrast, Pilate was generous with this praise, swearing on his ancestors that he would not forget my face nor my name. (In reality I was content with the voluble spirit I noted, at least until Friday...)

Although this Roman tried to imitate Caesar in many of his styles and behaviors—especially those which resonated with the public—when it was time to eat, he distanced himself significantly from Tiberius' extreme sobriety. The “snack” that the slaves began to serve consisted of, among other “minutiae”, sea urchin, oysters delivered expressly from the breeders at the artificial Lake Lucrina, oiled young hens stuffed with barley and roasted, then served over breaded oysters and other shellfish which Pontius referred to as “barnacles” (black and white ones. All of this was only the appetizer.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth courses were even more sophisticated. There were roe deer sirloin steaks, birds coated in flour, and something I had never seen before: breaded cow's udder. At the end, there was moray eel from the Strait of Gades at Cadiz and dates soaked in sweet black broth made from Sicilian wines. The banquet was unremittedly watered with the wine Joseph brought as well as no less reputable wines from Chios and Lesbos. Given the time of year and the long journey necessary to transport the oysters and the shellfish I decided to excuse myself from trying them by mentioning a supposed acute stomach ailment to Pontius. In exchange, I saw I had the burdensome obligation to sample the sow's udders.

Between jokes and laughter, Pilate asked me if I had the opportunity to savor dishes like these at Tiberius' table in Capri. Naturally, and with great rejoicing on his part—I commented that the Caesar's frugality was killing his friends and astrologer with hunger. (In a rapid and opportune intervention from the module, my brother had supplied me with information by reminding me of some of Tiberius' favorite dishes. *Santa Claus* had extracted the following data from the *Natural History* (Volume XIX, Chapters 23 & 28) by Pliny the Elder, “These were almost exclusively vegetable entrees, especially ones with asparagus and cucumbers, which his gardeners grew in wheeled boxes in order to move them from the sun to the shade, depending on the weather. He also ate radishes that were transported from Germany. These vegetables were the cause of frequent disputes with his son Drusus II, who refused to taste them. The Emperor was equally fanatical about fruit. Pears were his favorite. Tiberius boasted that he had the tallest tree in the world at his villa on the Tiber River. His sobriety went to such an extreme that even in his old age he drank the watery wine from Sorrento which is similar to *chacoli* Basque wine.”)

While I was expounding on these details of the Caesar's diet, Pontius Pilate, who was not very well informed about these peculiarities, emitted a long cavernous belch.

Then he called out, “By Jupiter! Tiberius is drinking vinegar. Now I understand why he doesn't need doctors. I have heard about his sense of humor, but I never imagined that he also enjoys suffering...”

I dropped one of the greasy breaded sow's udders and began to roar with laughter. Meanwhile, he signaled for the slave from Gaul to bring him a washbasin. The young man waited while his master washed his hands and, as if it were their usual routine, he bowed in front of the governor and proffered his long silky hair. Pilate dried his hands with the slave's hair without even looking at him. Joseph and I exchanged a look of disgust.

against pernicious fevers and bites from poisonous animals, which were so common in the Palestinian forests and deserts at that time [Major's note].

Since Pilate had centered the subject of the conversation on the Emperor's well-known sense of humor, he begged me to recount some of the best jokes and anecdotes featuring Tiberius. This was so unexpected that it nearly cost me a serious debacle with the prefect. However, there was still one leftover that I was going to relate. It was more of a legend or a popular invention than rigorous history, but I was going to resort to an anecdote that circulated in Capri during Caesar's voluntary exile.

"It is said," I began, pausing to wait for Eliseo to give me new information, "though not very often, that the Emperor was startled by a fisherman on the island who approached to offer him a fish as a gift. With his characteristic cruelty, Tiberius ordered the fish to be thrown back into the man's face. Between cries of pain, the fisherman, who must have had a special sense of humor like the Caesar, said he was happy he hadn't offered him a lobster. On hearing this, the Emperor continued the humorous dialog with his subject. He made them bring a lobster with a row of spikes on its shell and throw it into the fisherman's face."

Pilate nodded. "That is Tiberius," he remarked.

By that time, Santa Claus had memorized other events; some of them were faithful reflections of the profound contempt Caesar Tiberius felt for his fellow man. Even at the risk that Pontius already knew them, I proceeded to recount them.

"Admirable governor, I is also said that one a certain occasion the Emperor received ambassadors from Troy who came to express their grief for the death of Caesar's son. Since these Trojans arrived rather late, Tiberius responded, 'I, in my turn grieve for the death of your most glorious citizen Hector...'"

Pilate drained his umpteenth cup of wine and leaned further back into the fluffy feather pillows, then he motioned for me to continue.

"Another story circulates in Rome. Once Tiberius held a banquet. As the guests entered the *triclinium*, they noticed there was only half of a wild boar on the table. When the Caesar saw what they were doing he said, 'The half tastes the same as the whole boar.'"

Just as I had started to suppose, the effect of the fumes from the wine and his feast was not delayed. Pontius tried to support his head in the palm of his right hand, but he started nodding off. In a much lower voice, I told him what was to be the last tale.

"There have been times when this humor disguised an appalling barbarity. This was the case in an episode which occurred a little before he was named Emperor. As you know," I carried on without losing sight of the governor's pitching head, "when Augustus died, he left an important economic bequest in his will which Tiberius was gradually distributing. Very, well. One day a funeral happened to pass in front of the Capitol. One of those present approached the corpse and pretended to whisper in its ear. Tiberius found this odd, so he asked why he did that. The joker said he had requested the dead man to notify Augustus that he still had not received his share. Tiberius was enraged. He ordered him to be killed 'so he could carry the message to the deceased Augustus himself'.¹"

¹ Some of these anecdotes were introduced into the module's computer from the texts of Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*; Tacitus' accounts of Tiberius from the first six volumes of the *Annals* (Paris 1768); and Cassius Dio's *Roman History* (Volume LVI, Chapter 14) [Major's note].

At the conclusion of my narration, Pontius Pilate was lying face up in a deep sleep with his mouth open. At the advice of the centurion, we left the dining room very discreetly. Meanwhile, one of the servants seemed to follow another routine duty. He was initiating an arduous task: of poking a feather in the prefect's mouth to induce him to vomit...so he could enjoy the delicacies at the next meal.

We were already in the lobby where Civilis was preparing to dismiss us, when another centurion came to meet him. He communicated something in Latin, almost in his ear. The leader of the centurions did not respond to his companion's words. He hesitated an instant; finally, he turned to us and tried to excuse himself by informing us that the legion's tribunal—being a detachment of men from Caesarea, which included himself—was waiting his presence to proceed with the execution of a sentence.

This was equally new to me and I was very interested. Nonetheless, Civilis had not unglued his lips, instead he appeared to read the thoughts of those around him. He must have seized upon my desire for he addressed Joseph with an ironic and scornful air, which held his condition as a Jew in contempt.

“Now, if you wish, you can witness another act of justice of the Roman people.”

Neither I nor the elder had any ideas on the matter, but centurion's tone of voice made it sound like an order, so we hurried after him. In the company of the other officer, Civilis descended the marble staircase, turning right onto the square arcade. It was deserted, except for the man who held the neck of a heavy sack over his shoulder and the sentinal who stood beside him. Where were the rest of the troops? Soon the doubts were going to vanish.

As we passed through on of the door in the north wing of the square, we suddenly found ourselves in a clearing more than 30 feet long and 150 feet wide. The ground was completely covered in with very fine white sand. This enclosure was located inside the fortress and it occupied a good part of the northern side. Ostensibly, it was perfectly surrounded by the exterior wall of Antonia's Tower and by the complex of buildings that formed the remaining wings of the Roman headquarters.

There was a row of ten tents in the far east corner. They occupied that entire side of the rectangle. The officer who was leading us, explained that this was a training field. The tents were prefabricated with goat skins and dyed yellowish brown. Their roofs had two slopes¹. There were a series of slats that formed a framework under each of the translucent skins which was capable of lodging ten men. According to Civilis, the influx of thousands of Hebrews to the annual Passover, required a reinforced guard at Antonia's Fortress. These tents perfectly provided for the troops' needs as they moved with him from Caesarea.

In front of the *papilio* (a name which was given to the tents due to the resemblance of the curtains at their entrance to butterfly wings), half a dozen posts about 1.5 meters tall had been planted in the ground for the Roman exercises. All of these had notches in them as a result of the two-handed sword blows that rained down on them during training. Assorted swords, spears (which were twice the weight of the *pilum*), and regulation swords were stuck in the sand. Shields and helmets leaned against them. A few hundred soldiers, who, judging by their garments, were

¹ In the popular parlance, the act of staying or living in a campground with this type of facilities—that is with tents made from goat skins—was known among Roman soldiers as *sub pellibus esse* or “being under skins” [Major's note].

all off-duty, had congregated in the clearing where they formed cliques and talked in low voices. Upon seeing Civilis, the soldiers rushed to make way for him, adopting a respectful silence.

The leader of the centurions stopped in front of the training posts and saluted the tribunal as well as the centurions who had gathered there. The first one, being much younger than Civilis and the other officers, was a middle manager responsible for administration; rather than the legion's tactical command, which was the prerogative of the head centurion. The other was the leader of the regiment. However, during that era, the position's importance had considerably declined.

One of his duties was to initiate the execution of capital punishment. His attire was practically the same as the other two centurions, for example, his cape and toga were purple and he generally did not carry weapons. The officers held a brief conference; immediately afterwards, one of them gave an order for the culprit to be lead into the arena. Suddenly the mercenaries began to mill around the two soldiers who entered the training camp. Both of them carried a good number of sticks that were a meter long. Between pushing, protests, and all sorts of imprecations, each of about fifty Romans finally received a baton. Then silence fell over this mass of madmen again.

Soon we saw what appeared to be a young man covered with the typical red legionnaire's tunic being escorted by two sentinels through the same gate we had used to enter the clearing. Presently they arrived in front of the centurions and Civilis saluted them with his arm held high. The condemned man responded to the salute and without any further preamble, the leader of the centurions commanded the guard to strip him of his clothes.

From my position behind the officers, I observed how Civilis handed his grapevine baton to the tribunal. While one of the sentinels held his partner's lance, his partner seized the toga at its neckline and, with a strong jerk, ripped it down to the waist. At once, the soldier grabbed the lower part of the garment and tore it completely open with another accurate yank. He flung the tunic into the sand and proceeded to remove the unfortunate man's loincloth.

Once the he was naked, the guard and the centurions receded a few steps, thus leaving the offender in the center of a circle formed by the 40 to 50 mercenaries who had obtained sticks. To my surprise, the unhappy man did not even move. His face paled and his eyes, which bulged from a growing terror, seemed inattentive. Then the tribunal approached the Syrian and lightly touched him with the grapevine Civilis had ceded.

Instantly, as if impelled by a savage irrational hatred the soldiers jumped on the victim beating him between shouts and insults. The young man instinctively raised his arms over his head, but the rain of blows was not long in doubling his knees. His forehead, face, and ears were crushed and covered with blood. The moment he fell, the panting sweaty human beasts hit him harder with their batons until the victim was curled into a ball with his face in the sand.

At that point Civilis signaled one of the centurions, and that colossus—who was nearly two meters tall with the aspect of a bear—roughly opened a passage through the crazy huddle. On seeing him, the mercenaries ceased the attack. Then the silence, which was barely broken by the castigators', agitated breathing—reigned again. This centurion, who was named Lucilius had been given the nickname *cedo alteram*¹ by the legion at Pannonia because scarcely had he broken

¹ The expression "*cedo alteram*" means "give me another".

a stick on a soldier's back, than he would ask for another and another, always saying "*cedo alteram*." Consequently, this image would be difficult for me to erase from my memory as he played a distinguished role on the flagellation of the Teacher from Galilee...

Lucilius positioned himself one meter from the defendant. He snatched the stick from one of the soldiers, raised it above his head and released a dry precise blow just above the nape of the defendant's neck. At the impact, the unhappy man's head caved-in and his now lifeless body fell on its side. The "beating" a common practice in the Roman legion, was finished.

During the time that the soldiers returned the batons and slowly departed from the training field, one of the medics knelt before the victim and checked his pulse. The merciful blow from the giant "*cedo alteram*" had been decisive in cutting short the suffering of this deserter. Civilis did not seem altered in the least by the bloody spectacle. He answered my inquiry about the cause for this execution with the explanation that the subject had committed one of the worse offenses one could incur; he had abandoned his guard post¹.

These soldiers were consummate professionals who wielded the whips by simply flicking their wrists. This way the thongs curled, rippled, and attained the maximum effect with minimal effort. Following the briefest court martial, the tribunes and officers had decreed his death. This tragic event led me to ponder what I had read in relation dereliction of duty by the Roman guards who were guarding Jesus' tomb. A presentiment was set afloat in my mind...if the Roman sentinels knew what sort of luck awaited them if they defected from the mission they had been entrusted with, how did this fit with the commentaries of numerous Catholic exegetes who claim that "the sentinels who guarded the sepulcher fled in terror"? (Once again the facts recorded at dawn on Sunday would not coincide with the "theological justifications" which were so hastily conceived that they lack rigor.)

As I passed through the arcaded courtyard and saw the same mercenary with a heavy bundle on his back, I could not resist the temptation. So I asked the centurion who escorted us through the tunnel that lead out of Antonia's Tower. Civilis clarified that it was an "ignominy" or minor punishment. The officer did not mention the details of the offense, but this soldier's sentence was to hold a load of soil on his back all day. (Eliseo confirmed that, Augustus, who was the previous emperor, had invented this type of penalty.)

The soldiers had returned to their regular chores. Some sat on pine benches under the portico busily cleaning their belt and swords or repairing their sandals. I remember the sole of one of the soldier's sandals catching my attention. I picked up one of his sandals and—before his astonished eyes—counted the number of nails hammered into it. Fourteen! They formed an "S" which started at the heel and filled virtually the entire sole. (I would also like to point out that this lethal footwear was going to produce painful lesions on Jesus of Nazareth.)

It must have been three o'clock in the afternoon when, after recovering "Moses' staff" and saying farewell to Civilis, Joseph and I crossed the drawbridge and thus concluded our hectic, but instructional visit to Pontius Pilate's headquarters. When the Sadducee I had entreated to follow Judas Iscariot and wait for us at a little past the sixth hour (which is about noon), saw us enter Joseph's mansion, he kissed us on our cheeks as a sign of welcome.

¹ The beating or *castigatio* was a solemn execution that even applied to officers. All of those who abandoned their guard posts, pillaged homes or towns when the legion passed through, rebelled against their leaders, committed homicide or theft, lost their weapons, repeated the same mistake three times, made attempts against modesty, or were negligent on their night watch would incur this sentence [Major's note].

Ishmael ben Fabi I was a descendent of the high priest Simon and was a Sadducee¹. I never could thank him enough for his information and loyalty. We made ourselves comfortable in the courtyard where the luncheon with Jesus and the Greek had taken place. After the banquet, I gave Joseph an account of the mission I had given Ismael, then Ishmael went on to relate what happened in the Temple. (In the Gentile's Courtyard I had acquainted Ishmael with the fact that Joseph of Arimathea was one of Jesus' friends and disciples who definitely knew about Judas' "irregularities" as the group's administrator as well as his very open opposition to the ideas on the nature of the Kingdom the Teacher preached about.) Deep down Ishmael recognized that meeting me had been an act of providence.

As he made his way inside the Temple in search of information, the Sadducee had developed a plan, which Joseph approved of the instant it was explained to him. Perhaps the resignation of nineteen members of the Sanhedrin, including the former member in my company, had been rather hasty. The Teacher's followers were aware of the decree to "pursue and capture" Jesus and they did not delay in lamenting this mass desertion from the supreme organ of justice. Without an informer who could track the Sanhedrin's steps from the inside, the security of the Rabbi of Galilee and the entire group was seen to be seriously compromised. It was necessary for someone to affect a reinstatement to the council of the 71 to act as a spy. Furthermore, Ishmael thought, this could be a golden opportunity strengthen the surveillance of Joseph alias "Caiaphas" and his supporters.

"So, armed with courage," Ishmael proceeded, "I went to the high priest's lodgings and requested an interview with him. Cognizant of his extreme vanity, I procured a gold and silver² cup beforehand. After placing that rich present in his hands, it wasn't too difficult to convince Caiaphas of my honest intention to return to the Sanhedrin's breast. I told him, 'After intense reflection, I ended up understanding the why you wanted to implement that commission in reaction to the Galilean's blasphemous preaching about the resurrection of the dead.'

"The high priest rejoiced at my decision and recommended that I persuade the other dissidents to follow my example. Thanks to this sophism, dear friends, that very same morning I attended an informal meeting of the Caiaphas with the Sanhedrin were, without my even imagining it, Judas was to be one of the protagonists."

Ishmael paused and took both of my hands in his. "And I owe it all to you, brother Jason. May God, blessed be his name, bless you."

An uncomfortable uncertainty began to sprout in the depths of my being. What had happened in the Temple that morning? Why was Ishmael so effusively grateful for my idea for him to follow Judas?

"An hour past the third hour (approximately ten o'clock in the morning), nearly all of the Sanhedrin gathered in the Hall of Hewn Stones. Naturally the attendees discussed the charges

¹ Simon ben Boethus was a high priest in Jerusalem between 22 BC and 5 BC. A brother of Ishmael—who was also a member of the powerful and wealthy group of Sadducees—would be high priest around the year 61 AD [Major's note].

² From the testimony of Flavius Josephus' in *Antiquities of the Jews* (Volume XIII), I knew that the Sadducees used gold and silver tableware for eating, denied the resurrection of the dead, and strived to enjoy the Earthly life to the fullest. A clear Hellenistic influence is notable in this standpoint. Caiaphas either was a Sadducee or shared their ideology [Major's note].

against Jesus for a long time, especially the method of capture and the procedure to follow which would lead him to the Roman authority and ensure the application of the death sentence. This last point still worried Caiaphas, the scribes and the Pharisees. They know the governor is not an easy man and they have not reached an agreement about the legal argument they should present to him.”

As Ishmael discovered that last night—on Tuesday—while Jesus and his disciples were returning to their camp at Gethsemane, the Sanhedrin had gone back to analyze the last speech that the Galilean gave at the Temple esplanade.

“All of them, for one reason or another, endorsed the council’s earlier decision and urged Caiaphas to act immediately and arrest Jesus of Nazareth without delay. Suspecting that the Rabbi from Galilee would not appear at the Temple the tomorrow, Wednesday, the high priest and his advisors issued a new more precise order for the Levites to seize him before Friday. However, a question remained floating in the air: how to arrest the imposter without inciting the masses and above all, without provoking the Roman garrison which was responsible for maintaining order in Jerusalem.

“The group of Sadducees was much more radical than the scribes or the Pharisees: they voted to assassinate the Rabbi, but the Pharisees rejected this proposal because it was considered too risky.”

The Sadducee interjected, “You say the assembly reconvened this morning in order to reveal the charges against the Teacher.”

“That’s right.”

“Would you summarize them for me?”

“The motives of the Pharisees differ from those of the Sadducees. They are based on the following declarations. First: they fear Jesus because they are very conservative and they do not want the people to withdraw their old prestige as ‘religious teachers’. Second: they maintain that Jesus is violating the law. They claim that he has contravened the Sabbath and many other sacred ceremonies. Third: They consider it blasphemy to proclaim oneself Son of the Divine. And fourth and last: they feel offended by the Rabbi’s final denunciation at the Temple.

“As for the Sadducees: their wish to see our Teacher put to death on account of the proceeding charges. First: they fear the people’s growing sympathy for Jesus will put the nation’s existence in grave danger. They say the Romans will never accept a revolutionary movement like the one Jesus seems to preach about. Second: this strange doctrine of the Rabbi of Galilee asks for a brotherhood among all men, and this is insulting. They are the ones who are solely responsible for social order and they tremble before such a contemporary philosophy. And third: the Teacher’s ‘cleaning’ of the Temple by knocking down the brokers’ tables and his expulsion of them from the atrium had heaped too much on their patience. From my information, the financial losses have been very substantial. I suppose you know that Caiaphas, as well as his father-in-law, Anas are involved in the business with the moneychangers and the brokers. Although the Teacher is the true liberator of Israel, the high priest’s heart is choked with hate and resentment and it will not abate until he is eliminated.”

Ishmael regarded Joseph with a poignant sadness. “His luck is cast,” he added.

I tried not to divert the conversation anymore and appealed to the Sadducee to inform us about what transpired this morning.

“Well, you will see: according to my investigations on Tuesday, Judas held a meeting with some of his friends and relatives. There were Sadducees among the first, who were friends of his father’s family. These were the ones who encouraged him to take the step which would absolutely put an end to it. Judas Iscariot said that after much deliberation, he had come to the conclusion that it had been a mistake for him to remain with Jesus’ group—”

“Why?” I interrupted him again with my ardent desire to know the real reasons that had pushed Judas.

“According to what he professed, the Teacher was only an idealist; a benevolent dreamer who was not the expected liberator of Israel. He was also obsessed with finding a way to withdraw from that movement in a satisfactory manner. Judas’ confession was cleverly addressed to the Sadducees who coveted his heart. Once they are assured of his renunciation, he will be quite welcomed by the priests’ dignitaries. They came to promise him grand honors and sufficient public recognition to elevate his prestige among the Hebrews and erase the ‘unfortunate association with the no so illustrious Galileans.’”

(This trap was Judas’ ruin. Aware of his acute aversion for ridicule and his irrepressible ambition, the promises of honors, dignity, and public recognition irreversibly unleashed his old decision to desert Jesus’ group. Curiously, and I believe this is a point of utmost importance, Judas did not think of the gold at the time he sold his Teacher. It was a mere consequence. Now think objectively; of what importance were thirty pieces of silver, when he was the same person who was the treasurer for the group and managed and dispersed everyone’s money for four years? On this subject, I must mention that prior to Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on Sunday morning, Iscariot has placed the purse with the communal money in the hands of Simon the Leaper in an indubitable act of honesty. If Judas had cherished the idea of money as the only reward for his betrayal, it would be logical for him to steal all or part of the funds from the movement for which he was the administrator. As we are going to see, the apostle’s motivations were very different and much deeper.)

“Judas admitted to his friends and relatives that he was convinced the Teacher’s mission could not succeed. A confrontation with the powerful members of the Sanhedrin could only occur to, in his own words, a ‘crazy man’ and he did not wish to perish with the rest in the hands of the Jewish or Roman justice. Basically, Judas did not want to endure being identified as a supporter of a failed movement,” said Ishmael who knew the traitor’s tortured personality very well.

To the Sadducee’s narration, I dare to add an incident—which I described earlier—and that in my friend’s opinion was an illuminating time for understanding Judas’ conduct. I am referring to the scene with the perfume bottle: the oil that Mary poured over Jesus and his subsequent harsh criticism of Iscariot. I reiterate that Joseph and Ismael both agreed with the idea that the disciple’s sensitive mind started to plot the form of his revenge from that moment.

“Yes,” Joseph responded. “Judas is a resentful man. In my opinion, he will never forgive the Teacher for not distinguishing him from the rest as he has done with John, Peter, and James. It is likely,” the elder lamented, “that Judas’ twisted soul is going against Jesus as much as his three companions.”

“The case is that after the Sanhedrin’s meeting,” continued the Sadducee, “Caiaphas order Judas and one of his family members to enter the Hall of Hewn Stones. To my understanding, it was his cousin. He made a petition to the council and was therefore the first one to speak. He introduced Judas and bored everyone with a very long-winded speech in which he justified his cousin’s decision to abandon the Galilean’s group. He asserted that Judas had realized his error and he desired to make a public renunciation of his association with Jesus. In exchange for this, he requested the pardon, confidence, and friendship of all of the dignitaries who were congregated there.

“And as a proof of their sincerity, Judas’ spokesperson proposed, his relation was prepared to facilitate the quiet and secret arrest of the Nazarene in such a way to avoid an uprising of the multitude and a possible delay of his capture as a consequence of the imminent observance of Passover. Those latter statements from Judas’ cousin excited the members of the Sanhedrin to an extraordinary degree, since they saw a new light for proceeding with the apprehension of the imposter. Then Caiaphas invited Judas to second the claims he had just heard.

“The traitor took a few steps toward the president and replied with as much firmness as coldness, ‘I will do everything my cousin promised. I want Jesus to remain under your custody. In exchange, I request public recognition....’”

(The word “custody” which was repeated several times by Ishmael was going to be of utmost importance for Judas. He reiterated that the hour of exacting the Teacher’s “custody” was not gratuitous. As we shall see shortly, in addition to Judas’ extreme delusion in regards to the priests, he never thought the Teacher was going to be executed, but simply imprisoned or kept in their custody.)

“I believe the traitor did not catch the distain in Caiaphas’ expression,” Ishmael continued with visible disappointment. “If Judas had realized they were setting a trap, he probably would not have accepted this situation. But the crafty Caiaphas didn’t let his true intentions show through. Moreover, he avoided Judas’ approaches by saying, ‘You should agree with the head of the Levites about the manner in which you will take us to this Galilean tonight or on Thursday morning, after sunrise, at the latest. When he has been captured, you will received your recompense.’

“When Judas heard the high priest’s words, his eyes shone with a special bright light. He felt satisfied and said so publically. Once he left the room, he held a long conference with the chief of the Temple police. I could not leave the Sanhedrin’s council, but a little later, I knew that the Levites had followed the traitor’s instructions and set the date for the Teacher’s arrest for Thursday night, during the time the pilgrims and the residents of Jerusalem would be inside their homes. The Levites learned from Judas himself that the Nazarene would be absent from the campground at Gethsemane, consequently they could not know the exact moment the Teacher would return; hence his capture had been postponed until the next night. The chief of the Jewish police requested Judas to come to the Temple the following morning in order to specify the details about the place and time of the apprehension. Now that the secret arrest of Jesus was finalized, all of the high priests in attendance gave a collective breath of relief and mutually congratulated themselves for the unexpected providential presence of this renegade. It was there, after short discussion that Caiaphas settled upon the price to ‘buy’ Jesus: thirty shekels of silver¹.

¹ I wish to call attention to the word “buy” since, as we shall see much further ahead, its significance opened a way to the solution to Jesus’ capture and Judas’ desperation [Major’s note].

“Some of the Sadducees, who believed the Sanhedrin were going to fulfill their promise to glorify Judas, thought this amount of money was excessive. However, the high priest made them see and understand that this was not the intention....”

A miserable silence put the final period on that meeting in Joseph of Arimathea’s house. As Ishmael had pointed out very well, the Teacher’s luck had been cast...it was unclear that these two men acted immediately. Before departing for the campground at Gethsemane, Joseph and Ishmael got entangled in a discussion which made me tremble. For the first time in the course of my mission my intervention—despite all of the precautions—was on the verge of provoking something irremediable. The Arimathean as well as the Sadducees thought they had to denounce Judas and alert the entire group. .

His eagerness was completely understandable. However, in an ultimate effort not to alter events, I ventured to make them comprehend this was not the most intelligent approach.

“I agree with our honorable desire to warn the Teacher,” I said. “But what will you gain with a public denunciation of Judas’ treachery?”

Neither the elder nor Ishmael seemed to understand me. I saw myself forced to resort to an argument which was, in the end, accepted by both of them.

“You know the enmity and the jealousy Judas has towards men such as John, Peter, and James. If these men begin to even suspect what is being planned by their comrade, what will happen?”

My friends assented silently.

“Talk to the Teacher in secret,” I continued, “if you deem it wise. But won’t it bring a tense atmosphere over the group? After you see Jesus, you can speak to Judas, if you consider it prudent,” I clinched it. “The Rabbi loves Judas Iscariot too, and he must know what to do.”

After a heated conversation, Ishmael and Joseph accepted my proposal and the three of us made the most of the remaining daylight by walking slope of the Mount of Olives. The elder and the Sadducee had the singular and exclusive aim to talk with Jesus of Nazareth and I, with my heart fearful at the possibility my excessive zeal for tracking Judas had initiated a catastrophe. When we entered the camp, the women had already prepared a comforting fire. Jesus still had not returned and the disciples were restless and ill humored. They were coming and going and blaming each other for the lack of decisiveness, which had led to the Teacher being unescorted.

Peter, who was more upset than anyone else, proposed that a group of armed men leave on a search. However, Andrew, with his customary serenity—reminded them of the Rabbi’s words, making them see that he had said, ‘No man can put his hands on me before the hour for it has arrived’, hence things were as they should be. While we waited for Jesus and John Mark to come back, David Zebedee joined the people gathered around Joseph of Arimathea, Ishmael ben Fabi and me. With great stealth, he communicated to us that his agents in Jerusalem had informed him of a plot that was being forged to put an end to the Teacher’s life. We looked at him without knowing what to do. Even so, Joseph was aware of this astute disciple’s distinctive discretion from long before and this reassured us.

To my immense relief, the meeting between Judas and the Sanhedrin had been infiltrated and the men who worked for Zebedee were not long in informing him about it. For many years

Jesus' group had constructed a curious network of "couriers" or emissaries which was organized and directed by David Zebedee whose task was the transmission of news. In this way, countless friends, families, and sympathizers of the movement were well informed of the messages and orders which emanated from Jesus or his men. David had been watching how the relations between the Teacher and the members of the Sanhedrin had deteriorated step by step on their own initiative and had decided to hide a corps of special messengers into the camp at Gethsemane.

Just as Lazarus and his sisters knew, this Jewish man of great mental clarity and bravery also seemed to understand better than the apostles how this was going to be the end for Jesus. Nonetheless, he did not reveal these fears in front of the rest of the Nazarene's close friends. Continuing with his same reserved behavior, David divulged his pessimistic impressions, making us to understand that he had, as a precaution against the worst, sent one of his couriers to the community at Bethsaida (north of Lake Gennesaret) several days earlier with a message for his mother and Jesus' mother Mary to come to Jerusalem at once. The messengers had returned at four o'clock in the afternoon on Wednesday and reported to Zebedee that the women and some members of their families from Galilee were already on the road and would reach the campsite tonight or perhaps much later on Thursday morning.

Joseph thanked him on behalf of everyone for the confidence David had demonstrated by connecting us to the current status of these details and in compensation he begged him to keep his mouth shut about Judas until he had confirmed the news in regard to the betrayal. Suddenly our conversation was interrupted by a growing agitation among the disciples who were wandering in the orchard.

Andrew plunged out in front of us and burst out, "He brought news that Lazarus had fled from Bethany."

David smiled wryly. When Andrew had moved off into the distance he remarked sorrowfully, "Don't be alarmed. It was one of my messengers who carried the information to Lazarus about the Sanhedrin being ready to arrest him today. They had orders to go directly to Philadelphia and take refuge in Abner's house."

I did not consider it opportune to ask whom this Abner was, however I imagined he was one of Jesus' followers in Perea on the other side of Jordan. Joseph was still very impressed. He held the resurrected man in high esteem. With the knowledge of what happened, he began to assess the situation concerning Caiaphas' extremely ominous resolution for the high priest to arrest the Teacher to its full extent. Even so, he waited patiently for Jesus to arrive.

The night had already closed in when the giant and Mark irrupted into the camp as alone as they were when they set out. Jesus untied the linen that was knotted around his hair and exhibiting an excellent mood, greeted his friends and sat down next to the fire just as he usually did. But the reception was not warm. These men were too frightened and confused to follow the Teacher's jokes. They were so intrinsically accustomed to his presence that the day without him had been very long and empty. Jesus noticed the tense environment and their fraught faces. Still no one dared to question him. Not even the one who had the courage to relay the rumor about Lazarus' precipitous escape....

In spite of this, the Galilean tried all means to clear the loaded atmosphere and for a long interval he interested himself with the disciples' families. Presently Jesus came to David Zebedee, and asked him very specific questions about his mother and his younger sister, but David lowered his eyes to the ground and did not answer. It was clear that the leader of the courier that did not

cease entering and exiting the camp—had preferred not to hurt Jesus by revealing that he had given orders for Mary and the rest of his family to come to Jerusalem.

At that instant, I observed the disciple's fragility and I felt very sympathetic towards him. This sentiment was transformed into admiration in view of his conduct following the unbearable hours that followed Jesus' arrest. It was this very man and his corps of messengers who were going to established as the "heart" and "brain" of the battered group during the black days that lay ahead....

Since these final hours were not producing the intimacy and familiarity the Teacher desired, he took this opportunity to have a word with them.

"You will not allow the multitude to be deceived. Those who heard us in the Temple and seemed to believe in our teachings are the same ones who will listen to the superficial truth. Very few permit the words of truth to hit them hard in their hearts and sprout roots of life. Those who only know the gospel with their minds and do not experience it in their hearts cannot be confident in bad moments and during genuine crises.

"When the leaders of the Jews reach an agreement about destroying the Son of Man, and when they make a single order, then you will see how these cowards escape consternation or move away in silence. Then, when the adversity and persecution descend over us you will come to see how others, who thought they loved the truth will abandon us and renounce the gospel. You have to rest today as we prepare for the times which draw near. Therefore keep watch and pray that in the morning you will be fortified for what comes."

As we listened to these last words, Judas who had returned to the camp shortly before us, raised his eyes and stared at Jesus. Yet with the exception of David Zebedee and us three, none of the disciples associated the warning with Iscariot's impending desertion.

Around midnight the Galilean invited his friends to retire and rest.

"Go to sleep, my brothers," he said with special sweetness, "and keep the peace until we rise in the morning...one more day to do the Father's will and experience the joy of knowing we are his children."

THURSDAY APRIL 6

It was already past midnight, when the disciples began to stand up one by one and leave the fire. While they sought refuge in the tents or wrapped their mantles around themselves and sheltered under the stone wall, Andrew proceeded to assign the first shift of the watch which consisted of two men armed with swords. One man was stationed to the south at the entrance to the grove, the other guarded the north near the cavern. They would be relieved every hour.

Yet Jesus did not move. He sat a meter and a half from the bonfire with his back to the olive trees. He lingered a few minutes staring at the flames' dark red undulating tongues, which sputtered from time to time since some of the logs were damper than the others. Soon I was left alone, in front of him with the campfire as my only nearly mute witness for what was going to be my third and final conversation with the Teacher. He rested his arms on his crossed legs. Then the Nazarene held his hands open as he warmed his palms with the heat from the fire. His head was slightly bowed so his hair and face were illuminated, then darkened at the caprice of the playful flames. The pleasant and peaceful expression he had all night, turned stern.

Suddenly my heart turned over. A shiny, timid tear slowly appeared on his right cheek. It was the second time I would see this strange man cry... I was so touched and fascinated by the Galilean's serene, unexpected crying, that I did not even breathe. But Jesus seemed totally absent. After a few minutes, he threw his head back, inhaled deeply, and stood up. An infinity of hypotheses about the state of the Galilean's spirit roiled through my mind, however did not dare to move. I watched him go deeper into the olive grove and pause approximately thirty or forty paces from where I sat. And that is where he stood with his head lowered for the space of an hour.

The moon, which was almost full, stood alone among thousands of stars and bathed him in its gentle light which oscillated in the intermittent breeze that tip-toed between the lace formed by the olive trees' green leaves. I waited without knowing exactly why. The temperature had dropped significantly causing the stars to shiver with white, blue, and red chills. I do not know exactly how long I stayed with my face lost in that magnificent black firmament. At that time, Venus was in conjunction with the sun, so it was not visible. Jupiter shone with a much fainter brilliance (magnitude 1.6 or so) which grew fainter. It was a difficult struggle for it to rise in the west, a short distance from the Pleiades beautiful star cluster. These higher beings contended for supremacy with the refulgent stars Regulus, Capella, Aldebaran, Betelgeuse, and Arcturus which are mixed in with the constellations of Leo, Auriga, Taurus, Orion, and Bootes, respectively.

I was surprised when Jesus fed the bonfire with a new load of wood.

"Jason, why aren't you sleeping?" he inquired. "You know the coming hours will be formidable. You should rest like everyone else..."

I sat by the fire and studied him with curiosity, soon afterward I invited him to respond to a question I had been carrying around inside me since I had first seen him go off into the olive grove.

"Teacher, why does a man like you need to pray? Since, if I am not mistaken, that is what you have been doing during this time..."

The Galilean hesitated. Before he answered, he sat down again, this time he sat beside me.

“You are right, Jason. While a man endures his mortal condition, he searches for and needs answers. Truly, I say only this thirst for truth can appease my father. Neither power, nor fame, nor even knowledge can lead a man to genuine contact with the realm of Spirit. It is through prayer that the human accesses the infinite. My spirit is beginning to be tormented and I also need my father’s consolation.”

“Is true knowledge in your father’s Kingdom?”

“No, my father is wisdom.”

Jesus emphasized the word “is” with a force that did not permit debate.

“Then if I pray, I can satisfy my curiosity and enlighten my spirit?”

“A prayer is always really born in your spirit. No request receives an answer unless it proceeds from the spirit. Truly, truly, I say man is wrong when he intends to convey his prayers and his pleas for his own or others material benefit. This communication with my father’s divine Kingdom will only receive a complete answer when it follows from a yearning for knowledge or spiritual consolation. The rest, being the material necessities that so preoccupy you, are not a consequence of prayer, but of my father’s love.”

“Is this why you insist so much that one seek the Kingdom of god and its righteousness?”

“Yes, Jason. The rest is always given to you automatically.”

“And how should we ask?”

“Ask if you have already received it. Remember that faith is the true supporter of this spiritual appeal.”

“You say that prayers that are formulated in this manner always obtain a reply. Yet I know it’s not always that way.”

The Galilean smiled benevolently. “When the prayers truly originate from the human spirit, sometimes they are so profound that they cannot be answered when the soul has not yet entered my father’s kingdom.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Don’t forget. The answer always consists of spiritual realities. If a man has not reached the required and advisable degree of spiritually to assimilate the knowledge emanating from the Kingdom, then he must wait in this world or in others until his evolution permits him to recognize and comprehend the answers that were apparently not received at the moment of his petition.”

“Would this explain the anguished silence that occasionally seems to be the only response to a prayer?”

“Yes, but don’t be confused. The silence does not mean it has been forgotten. As I said, all of your supplications that are borne from the spirit receive a response. All of them...let me explain it to you with an example: the son always has the right to ask his parents a question, but they can delay the answers and make the child wait until he has acquired sufficient maturity to understand them. The big difference between human parents and our real father is that sometimes the former forgets they are obliged to respond even though years have passed.”

“According to this, we will all be wise when we die...”

“I insist the only valid wisdom in my father’s Kingdom is that which springs from love. After tasting death, no one will be wise if they were not so during their lifetime.”

“Then, should I think the delay in an answer to my prayer is a sign of my progressive advancement in the spiritual world?”

Jesus regarded me complacently. “There are an infinity of indirect answers compatible with the mental and spiritual capacity of the one who asks. Nevertheless, when a question is temporarily unanswered, it is frequently a sign that a reply will be supplied in your day to enrich your spiritual evolution.”

“Why are all of the results so complex?”

“No my dear friend. Love is not complicated. It’s our natural ignorance that plunges us into darkness and inclines us to permanently justify our errors.”

I kept silent. This man had all of the reasons. Only men try desperately to justify themselves and their failures...I gazed up at the stars and, as I pointed to the marvel, I said, “How do you feel about this beauty?”

The Nazarene also raised his eyes to the firmament. “Sad...” he replied in a melancholy voice.

“Why?”

“If man is incapable of accepting the greatness of this work in his soul, how can he grasp the beauty of the one who created it?”

“Is god as immense as you say?”

“Rather than thinking about the immensity of my father, you must believe in the immensity of his divine promise. It is beyond the spirit of man and would produce vertigo in all of the celestial hosts.”

“You have already explained this to me, but is the truth which is accessed from your father’s Kingdom available to all mortals?”

“Our father’s Kingdom,” Jesus corrected me, “is in everyone’s heart and each one of them is human. Only the ones who have awakened to the light of the gospel can discover and penetrate it.”

“So all religions, creeds, or beliefs will bring us to the truth?”

“There is one truth and our father distributes it freely. It is possible that pleasure and beauty can be as costly as ugliness and vulgarity, yet it is not so with truth: truth is a free gift that sleeps in all humans, whether they are gentiles or not, powerful or not, educated or not, wicked or not...”

“Who do you hate the most?”

“In my father’s heart there is no place for hate. You must know this. Beware of hypocrites, but never pour the venom of revenge on them.”

“Who is a hypocrite?”

“One who preaches the way of the heavenly Kingdom, but is settled in this world. Truly I say hypocrites deceive the simple hearted and they do not even satisfy the mediocre ones.”

“Who do you esteem more a spiritual man or a revolutionary?”

The teacher smiled since he was a little surprised at my question. He put his left hand on my shoulder.

“I prefer the man who acts with love.” He answered firmly.

“But who can love the most?”

“A better question is: Who can understand the most?”

“Who?”

“The one who is capable of loving everyone--but watch out Jason—the one who truly loves does not place the word ‘love’ above one’s door to justify themselves to the world. And the one who gives does not write the word ‘charity’ for all to recognize. Sometimes when you see these words shamelessly displayed to the world, do not doubt that these are the ones whose sole purpose is attaining enrichment and exaltation from those over whom they brandish and air it.

“My father’s Kingdom resembles a woman who carries a container full of flour. While she walks along the road, the handle breaks off and the flour spills on the path behind her. The woman does not realize it and is unaware of her misfortune. When she arrives at her house, she sets the container on the ground and discovers it is empty.”

“That’s being capable of loving everyone,” I repeat with a slight nod, “How difficult that is!”

“Nothing is difficult for the one who has learned to yield.”

“But what do you say about injustices? Must we also learn to love those who humiliate and tyrannize us?”

“When the arises, ask your brother for an explanation, but never hate him. You can only feel content when you view your brothers with charity.”

“Now I am beginning to understand,” I remarked almost at the same time, “why the world is so unhappy...”

“The major fault in your world is the lack of generosity,” Jesus returned. “People who know and practice love seldom have the need to forgive as they are always ready to understand everything.”

“This is certainly true, but I always thought the greatest error in our world was its ‘indigestible’ technology.”

The Nazarene watched me with inexhaustible kindness.

“You must be patient and trust. Humanity is often so intoxicated and numbed with its discoveries and triumphs that it forgets its authentic, natural state lies in a serene spirit. The day they awaken from this heavy slumber, they will turn their eyes to the path of love, the only one which leads to true wisdom.”

Fatigue began to overwhelm both of us. So by mutual agreement, we decided to rest for the few hours remaining before dawn. While I wrapped myself in my cloak and set myself up as best as I could under one of the olives trees, a shooting star—a meteor—crossed in front of Kappa Lyrae and Nu Herculis tearing the sky’s veil and my own deep melancholy. Without meaning to I had started to love that man...

At 05:42 hours on Thursday April 6 in the year 30, the sun commenced to break though without any special difficulties. Eliseo proceeded to wake me up and provide his meteorological report as usual. The day promised to be magnificent. The average temperature was estimated to be 17°C with low relative humidity and clear skies.

“However, the module’s rawin¹ has measured a disturbance in the upper atmospheric levels. It has been localized as a vertical front from Iraq to Saudi Arabia. The electronic system confirms it as a jet stream current from the east (Equatorial type) with a maximum velocity of approximately 70 knots, an atmospheric pressure of 100 to 150 millibars, at an altitude of 14 to 17 kilometers.

“Attention Jason! *Santa Claus* is verifying the dates for the weather and everything appears to indicate that disturbance could cause strong winds from the east to carry sand from the Arabian deserts at Al Nafud and Dahna during the next 24 to 48 hours. We’re starting to confirm the chance of a sandstorm or sirocco over Palestine based on the crazy climb of the Tonnelot and aneroid barometers. It’s possible that if all goes well tomorrow, you will need to take off your mantle...”

This information turned out to be especially interesting. A strange phenomenon occurred the next morning, which was Friday. I had read about it in the holy scriptures in Luke (23:44-46), Mark (15:33-34), and Matthew (27:45-46). From the sixth to the ninth hour, this is from about noon until three o’clock, “total darkness covered the Earth” according to the words of the gospels. Although I did not want to draw conclusions a priori, Eliseo’s warning about the east to southeasterly trade winds and the chance of a fierce wind carrying waves of sand from the

¹ The Trojan Horse Project had equipped the module with a variety of meteorological equipment including a rawin, which is a type of low energy laser, with an internal return of such high sensitivity that it could measure the wind’s direction and force with an error of a few meters per second [Major’s note].

Arabian desert, gave me some idea of the true nature of the event mentioned in the New Testament...

Gradually the women were leaving the tents and building the fire. At around six o'clock, when I had taken a little walk around the campground in an attempt to stretch my muscles, I saw Judas exit through the stone fence. He was alone and, judging from his gait, in a particular hurry. He took the same path as he had yesterday. I lost sight of him as he went down the hill towards the Temple or perhaps the city's southern gates. For an instant, I thought about following him. But in the end, I gave up on the idea. The Trojan Horse Project's plans were different. It was most likely that Iscariot was going to me the Sanhedrin's police chief just as he had been instructed to do on Wednesday. On the other hand, Ismael the Sadducee had succeeded in infiltrating the council of high priests and promised to punctually inform us of each and every one of the traitor's steps as well as the movements of the Levites who were in charge of the Teacher's arrest. This reassured me so I immediately returned to the orchard.

Jesus and his men continued sleeping. I helped the women as much as I was permitted by stirring the fire and carrying the earthenware bowls of milk which was fresh from the two goats Phillip obtained on Wednesday and tied up inside the cave. While we prepared breakfast, the young John Mark burst into the campsite almost at the same time as he did yesterday. He arrived with a basket that was larger than the one he had carried the previous evening and delivered it to the women without saying a single word. Then he sat next to the fire. And there he stayed with his chin resting on his knees as if he was mesmerized by the flames' fragile dance.

Some of the disciples began to show signs of life. They stretched without the least amount of modesty. On seeing the boy, two of the disciples approached him and tried to ask Mark to recount what they had done during the long walk on Wednesday. But the boy lowered his eyes, wrinkled the space between his eyebrows, and did not unglue his lips. At the most, when Jesus' men were getting louder and pressuring him, John shook his head with a visible and increasing irritation. Several of the women protested this interrogation and asked the disciples to leave the child in peace. Other members of the group joined the curious inquisitors who begged and pleaded for him to at least tell them where they had stayed and whether they had been spied upon by the Sanhedrin's police. Finally, when I suppose Mark was bored with so many questions, he opened his mouth and told them what the Teacher's followers knew very well about how to settle the matter.

"The Rabbi asked me not to say anything to anyone."

And there, as I said, he ended the interrogation. On various occasions, Jesus shared confidential information with his men while asking them not to say anything. Everyone had generally known to respect this. The disciples were not very satisfied, especially Simon the Zealot, who had covered the last surveillance shift at the gates to the orchard and who feared for the Teacher's and the rest of the group's safety more than anyone else. As for me, John Mark's obstinate Hermeticism only served to arouse my curiosity even more. I would have investigated some of the evangelical texts for an account of what occurred that Wednesday, but they were equally "blank" in respect to the Nazarene's activities. How could I make Jesus' faithful companion talk? An excellent opportunity would be presented later that very Thursday...

Jesus soon appeared. There were faint rings under his eyes that were probably a result of his scant hours of sleep. I felt guilty when I saw him. If I had not involved him in conversation surely he would have rested more. All at once, I thought of what awaited him and I began to tremble. This actually had been his last peaceful night.

However my worries were instantly dispelled for the Galilean was in an enviable mood. He greeted everyone and, in accordance with his usual routine, headed to the wide earthenware tub with the intention of washing and dressing. But midway there, John Mark, who had just seen him, came running down the center of the path and embraced the Rabbi around the waist. Surprised by this warm welcome, the Teacher held the boy's face in his giant hands and gently tilted it upward towards him as he asked him a question in a tone of complicity.

“Did you remember the Corinth grapes?”

The little one smiled and nodded his head. Jesus rubbed his hands together as a sign of satisfaction and started to undress. I wondered about the Corinth grapes. What could this refer to? Suddenly I recalled one of Lazarus' explanations. The Teacher loved the seedless grapes which grew on the vines that had been planted by the resurrected man's father in his estate's main courtyard.

Now I was ready to execute another one of the missions that the Trojan Horse project had assigned me. This seems like a good moment, I said as I tried to reassure myself. The giant finished his ablutions. As soon as one of the women handed him the linen cloth he was going to use to dry himself, I went close to him and asked if he would allow me to assist him. The Nazarene resisted at first, but faced with my insistence, he put a part of the cloth in my hand while he rubbed himself with the other end of the linen with an amusement that made it seemed like a game.

In reality, this maneuver had a double purpose. First, I proceeded with a direct manual exploration of Jesus' body. The fact is it was neither logical nor easy for me to expect that I would have this opportunity on another occasion. Secondly, I intended to measure the main parts of his anatomy. The second objective was especially vitally important for the optimal analysis of his organism during the hours of the crucifixion.

My hands were palpating his neck, shoulders, and back through the smooth cloth. Just as I had deduced from a simple visual observation, this Galilean was extraordinarily well built. The muscles of his back and upper body, especially the trapezius were very highly developed. This feeling of strength, which was doubtlessly the result of hard and continuous manual labor for many years, also extended to his deltoid muscles in his shoulder area. Those and the solid bulges of muscles that were distributed on each side of his spinal column (namely the large back muscles and the infraspinatus) lead me to think that Jesus possessed perfect synchronization of the rise and fall of his thoracic cavity. The shape of his massive arms was consistent with the considerable volume of the muscles in his shoulders, upper back, and torso. My assessment was that his biceps brachii were exceptionally thick and powerful. His huge pectoralis major muscles, which are commonly known as the chest, were sturdy and compact as if the Galilean had practiced swimming. His breathing capacity had to be excellent.

His waist as well as his lower back appeared to be without a gram of fat¹. I appraised the front of his abdomen: the muscular wall of the rectus abdominus was smooth, without any sign of adipose tissue. His legs, thighs, sartorius muscles, adductors, biceps femorus, semitendinosus muscles, and calves all rose to my touch as firm and hard as rocks. In my opinion, his lower extremities would have been the envy of a marathon runner...

¹ In this examination, my attention was powerfully drawn to the large surface occupied by the latissimus dorsi (the entire lumbar region), which was also an indication of this man's tremendous strength [Major's note].

This harmonious balance and muscular constitution were combined with the Teacher's great height where they made him, no doubt, a remarkably attractive specimen. It was as if nature had been very painstakingly precise when it constructed this man. To his evident perfection, it had also added the past four years of tireless activity as he travelled all of the roads in Israel. This had provided him with an enviable physique.

Once I concluded my examination—to the bafflement of those who were watching me—I took a small length of cord from the bottom of my oilskin bag. Before Jesus put on his tunic, I asked him to wait a moment. Without losing his smile, the Teacher let me operate with a docility, which only served to stun me even more. According to a prearranged mutual agreement with my partner in the module, each time I made a measurement I would press my right ear and transmit the result to him. This way Eliseo could input the values and subject them to a more complex analysis.

As I mentioned before, this white rope was divided into centimeters. Except each division was indicated by a black mark instead of a number. In order to make its circumference more exact, the marks went completely around the cord's perimeter. To perform the calculations accurately and avoid any kind of suspicion, the Trojan Horse project had devised a system of "numeration" based on colors and letters. (Every ten centimeters, the separation had been painted with one of six colors in the order of the basic color spectrum instead of the usual black. Starting at 70 centimeters and continuing to 100 centimeters, the colors repeated in sequence.) The order established for these primary colors was, from lowest to highest: violet, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. At the 70 centimeter mark, it began again with violet, blue, green, and yellow. The centimeters between these ten numbers were "converted" into letters according to the Greek alphabet. For example, when the measurement shows 30 centimeters, I would announce "green" to Eliseo. If it were 80 centimeters, I said "double blue." If, on the contrary, it was 41 centimeters, the code would be "yellow and alpha". Since alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet¹.

Without losing any time, I began with his upper extremities. The distance from his shoulder to the end of his middle finger was 82 centimeters. The code I used to transmit this value was "double blue" and "beta." The following values were obtained for his lower extremities, perimeters, size of his head, neck, etcetera².

¹ The first nine numbers—corresponding to each one of the centimeters—were associated with the first nine letters of the Greek alphabet: alpha for 1, beta for 2, gamma for 3, delta for 4, epsilon for 5, zeta for 6, eta for 7, theta for 8, and iota for 9 [Major's note].

² The logical difficulties of carrying out rigorous anthropological measurements without the use of more suitable instruments was partially remedied by entering the data I transmitted according to the set pattern into a data analysis program on the module's onboard computer. Once the anatomical measurements were processed, the results were as follows:

Upper extremities (total): 82 centimeters (arm: 37 centimeters and forearm: 45 centimeters. Twenty centimeters of this corresponds to his hand.)

Length of the lower extremities (total): 94 centimeters (measured from the heel to the hip joint). Thigh: 55 centimeters and leg 39 centimeters.

Width of the shoulders (measured between ends of the acromion): 45 centimeters. Torso (from the manubrium at the top of the sternum to the end of the greater trochanter or the projection of the femur at the level of the joint): 62 centimeters.

Thoracic diameter (from behind): 41 centimeters.

Circumference of the thoracic cavity (measured at the height of the pectoralis major) : 99 centimeters.

Maximum length of his head (from the end of the occipital bone to the glabella): 19.9 centimeters.

It was obvious that the Teacher with an athletic build with powerfully developed skeletal and muscular systems. His extremities were long, his thorax was truly imposing and his shoulders were as wide and solid as boulders. Any fat or adipose tissue was very scarce—practically nonexistent.

His head appeared strong and elongated with an equally long average face, a pronounced chin and bony prominences. His cranium, as I mentioned before, was high and narrow. These characteristics distinguished him from the norm of the Jewish race in that era. According studies of the Jews in southern Russia performed by von Luschan and Renan, the average height varied between about 1.60 meters to as height as 1.70 meters among the Hebrews from London and the Spanish Jews in Thessaloniki. Christ's, mesocephalic type was not very common either. For example, among the Hebrews in southern Russia, the percentage of brachycephalic individuals (ones with short craniums) was 81%, mesocephalics amounted to 18%, and dolichocephals, 1%. Of the Jew from Thessaloniki—who were expelled from Spain—the dolichocephals totaled 14.6% and the brachycephals 25%.

Maximum width of the head (between parietals): 15 centimeters.

Bi-zygomatic width (between the zygomatic arches: cheekbone to cheekbone): 14 centimeters.

Total height of his face (from the mandibular angle to the alveolar margin): 18.9 centimeters.

Circumference of his head: 58 centimeters.

Maximum circumference of his arms: 35 centimeters.

Maximum circumference of his forearms: 31 centimeters.

Maximum circumference of his thighs: 57 centimeters.

Maximum circumference of his legs: 46 centimeters.

Knees (maximum circumference): 42 centimeters.

Total height: 1.81 meters.

The midline or axis (from the nape of his neck to the intergluteal channel: from the top of the intergluteal cleft) appeared to be straight without deviation.

Maximum length of foot: 31 centimeters (flat with one degree of elevation).

Based upon the indicators created by Decourt and Pende, Jesus Christ's somatic morphotype was primarily the product of a combination of the "athletic" type and to a certain extent, the "pyknic" type. The indices which are the result of multiplying the actual measurements by factors discovered by the aforementioned scientists, were as follows:

Height: 181 centimeters \times factor 0.470 = 85.07; height of the trochanter : 94 centimeters \times .0457 = 42.96; distance between the two trochanters: 37 centimeters \times 1.250 = 46.25; distance between the humerus bones: 45 centimeters \times 1.052 = 47.34; distance from the occipital bone to the chin: 22 centimeters \times 0.870 = 19.14; thoracic circumference: 99 centimeters \times 0.470 = 46.53 and zygomatic width: 14 centimeters \times 1.820 = 25.48.

The Trojan Horse found that the Teacher's data coincided with the rating "VERY STRONG" (where the Pignet Index = height in centimeters – thoracic circumference at maximum exhalation plus his weight in kilograms = 181 – 97 plus 80 = 4). Of course, the values for the circumference of the thoracic cavity at maximum exhalation and his weight are approximations. (The Pignet Index [PI] assigns a rating to body builds according to the categories: IP 10 = very strong person; IP 15 to 20 = strong person; IP 20 to 25 = average person; IP 25 to 30 = weak person, and IP 30 = very weak person.)

The experts from the Trojan Horse team deduced—always in agreement with the collected data—that Jesus of Nazareth was a mesocephalic with the slightest dolichocephaly. A rate of 75% was obtained from the conventional formula

$$C.I. = \frac{DT \text{ (width measured between both euryon points)} \times 100}{DAP \text{ (distance between the opisthion and the glabella)}} = \frac{15 \times 100}{19.9} = 75.$$

From the lateral perspective, the craniometric index was 100.5%, which is hypsicephalic. In other words, the cranial height was clearly greater than the longitudinal diameter. Finally, based upon an examination of the Galilean's cranium from the frontal perspective, the index was 75% which indicates a hint of stenocephaly or an elongated cranium [Major's note].

In addition to his considerable height—1.81 meters—one's attention was drawn to the circumference of the Nazarene's thoracic cavity since it was much larger than the average size for his compatriots. Moreover, this athletic typology fit well with the energetic temperament described by Mauz as having a short reaction time to stimuli, confidence, vigorous motions, but hardly prodigious. The subject has more strength than precision.

It was doubtlessly this physical fortitude that may have contributed to his ability to endure the brutal beating which awaited him. Nevertheless, as we will see very soon, the doctors and the specialists from the Trojan Horse Project could never understand how this man managed to withstand the horrible chain of tortures he was subjected to until the final link. I must confess. This part of the mission was possibly the most unpleasant. Despite the gentleness Jesus displayed, for a long time I had the feeling that subjecting him to the aforementioned anthropometrical measurements had been abusive. I still believe this today...

Fortunately, no one present approached to ask me why I insisted on this rude almost ridiculous operation. The truth is, from the beginning I enjoyed a reputation among the Rabbi's followers as a strange man who did not know any better. Perhaps this justified my odd behavior on that splendid morning of Thursday April 6.

The Teacher finished dressing and his good mood continued as he joined the group of his friends who were waiting for breakfast. Phillip returned to distribute the bread that the boy had procured for us. It was still hot. The women gave everyone a cup of milk. The basket also contained plenty of toasted grain, dried figs, and an earthenware jar full of the famous Corinth grapes. All of this was a gift from John Mark's family to the Teacher and his followers. It was John himself who opened the jar and, beaming with satisfaction, emptied a good-sized handful of the shiny black fruit into Jesus' palms. Then he followed the Galilean instructions by sharing the rest of the grapes with everyone in the orchard.

This early morning collation took place in a relaxed atmosphere. The apostles seemed somewhat calmer than they had been the night before. However, some of them, such as Peter, Thomas, and the Zealot soon discovered that Judas was absent. Yet from the comments I could catch, they attributed this to Iscariot's normal obligations as the group's administrator and more specifically to the detailed preparations for the upcoming observance of Passover. No one there knew for sure where or how the Teacher was going to celebrate it. In my opinion, in view of the ominous events which had transpired as a result of the Sanhedrin's determination to arrest Jesus, no one was particularly worried about Passover.

Around ten o'clock in the morning, Joseph of Arimathea made an appearance at the campsite. One of his servants accompanied him. As soon as the Nazarene saw him, he invited him to sit down with the group. But Joseph politely refused, indicating that he needed to talk to Jesus alone. The Teacher stood and both of them moved away a few steps until they were beside the stone cask which faced the oil mill.

There with a serious expression and much gesticulation, the Arimathean explained what I already knew about Judas' plans. Luckily none of the disciples were able to hear the topic of the conversation between the elder and the Teacher. Jesus listened without losing his composure. Once Joseph had spoken, Jesus took him by the arm and they set out on a short walk along the length of the stone wall. Jesus conversed with the resigned member of the Sanhedrin for fifteen or twenty minutes. At dusk that very night Joseph revealed to me the words he had said to the Teacher during this brief meeting at the campsite.

Joseph of Arimathea's sudden visit and his mysterious exchange with the Rabbi did not go unnoticed by the disciples. Everyone's tongues wagged about the reason for this visit. And the majority of them guessed it correctly... half of it. Whispering between themselves, the apostles were inclined to think that something serious was happening, this "thing" had much to do with Jesus' capture, and the possible disintegration of the movement he held in his hands. The mood was tense again.

Once the conversation ended, Joseph headed into one of the tents and exchanged a few words with David Zebedee. Finally, after saying farewell to everyone, he left in the direction of Jerusalem. Jesus, who seemed more somber, went back to the group that was waiting around the bonfire. Before anyone managed to question him, he asked his men and women to accompany him.

At about ten-thirty, the complete group—composed of approximately fifty persons—began to ascend the slope of Mount Olivet. I lagged behind a little to warn Eliseo about the direction the group followed so he could anticipate how close they came to the module's security zone. By chance, the ship was stationed on top of the mountain much farther north. As the Nazarene approached the mountain's summit, he asked his friends to sit down and hear his words.

There was as much apprehension as expectation in the eyes of these Galileans. Essentially, all of those who were assembled there only wanted to be assured of one thing: that the Teacher had made the decision—as he had on other occasions—to retreat from the Holy City's jurisdiction in order to evade the threat of the priestly caste. However, this was not what they heard, although the Rabbi did allude to earthly power...

"Since the kingdoms of this world are material, they often consider it necessary to employ physical force for implementing and developing laws and maintaining order. In the heavenly kingdom, believers do not have to use physical force," he said among other things. "Because the kingdom of heaven is a spiritual brotherhood among children of god, it can be enacted solely by the power of the spirit. This distinction does not annul the right of social groups of believers to maintain order in their ranks, administer discipline to unruly and unworthy members. There is no incompatibility between being a child of the spiritual kingdom and a citizen of the civil secular government. The believer must give Caesar what is Caesar's and god what is god's... There can be no disagreement between these two requirements. Unless Caesar tries to usurp the gods prerogative and request spiritual homage and for one to surrender to a supreme worship," Jesus clarified. "In such a case, you should only worship god, while trying to enlighten those misguided leaders. You must not worship the spiritual rulers of the Earth. Neither should you use the physical force of terrestrial governments.

"From the perspective of an advanced world," Jesus continued as he directed a significant look at me, "children of the kingdom must become ideal citizens in the earthly kingdoms. Do not forget brotherhood and service are the cornerstones of the gospel. The call of the spiritual kingdom of love should prove to be effective in destroying the instinctive hatred between believers and non-citizens of the earthly world warriors. Yet these children of darkness with their material mentality will never know your spiritual light unless you approach them.

"So you must be honored and respected among the citizens and by the leaders of the world. Generous social service is only the natural consequence of a spirit that lives in the light. As mortals, you are indeed citizens of the earthly realm and you must be good citizens and more

when you have been reborn in the spirit. Therefore, you have a triple duty: to serve god, to serve people, and to serve the fellowship of god's believers.

"Do not worship temporary leaders, neither should you use physical force to promote the spiritual kingdom. Rather create an honest ministry of loving service for believers as well as non-believers. The mighty spirit of the truth resides in the kingdom's gospel. I will pour the spirit of this truth over you and your fruits will be powerful social levers that will elevate the race out of darkness. Truly, I say, this spirit will be your fulcrum with the power of a multiplier.

"Be knowledgeable and show wisdom in your dealings with non-believing civic leaders. For in the midst of discretion, you will demonstrate expertise at the time for allaying unimportant disagreements and fixing trivial faults in understanding. Seek for laws that are fair for everyone and to live peacefully with all men. Always thirst for knowledge like the serpent and be as harmless as the dove...

"You will be the better citizens if you know how to illuminate your spirit with the gospel's truth. Thus, the leaders of civic affairs will improve as a result of this belief in the heavenly kingdom. While the heads of terrestrial governments look to exercise their authority as religious dictators, you, the ones who believe in this gospel, can only expect problems, persecution, and even death..." Jesus paused allowing these last words to float like a black omen.

"But I tell you," the Teacher proceeded in a firm but hopeful tone, "the same light you bring into the world, even though you suffer for it, will finally enlighten all of humanity and as a result, this will cause the gradual separation of politics and religion." The Galilean fixed his eyes on me and continued.

"Persistent preaching of the kingdom's gospel will someday bring nations a new and incredible liberation with religious and intellectual freedom. I now declare under the coming persecution by those who hate this gospel of joy and freedom, you will flourish and my father's kingdom will prosper. Yet I do not deceive you. You will run into grave danger when, in later times, the majority of men speak well about the kingdom's believers and many, even those who hold high positions—accept the gospel. Learn to be loyal to the kingdom even in times of peace and prosperity. Don't tempt the angels who watch over you. Do not incite them to take you along paths strewn with difficulties like a lover of discipline, when you allow yourself to be carried away by luxury and vainglory.

"Remember you are responsible for preaching this gospel. The supreme desire is to do the father's will along with the supreme joy of the realization of faith in being children of god, and you must not allow anything to divert your attention. Make all of humanity benefit from the overflow from your loving spiritual ministry, enlightened intellectual communion, and inspired social service.

"But none of these humanitarian tasks must take over our hearts' true purpose: to proclaim the gospel. You must not seek the enactment of the truth, nor establish integrity using the power of the civic government, or the adoption of secular laws. You can work to persuade human minds, but you must never, never dare to impose. Do not forget the great law of human justice that I taught you: do unto others as you want them to do unto you.

"When a believer is called to serve the earthly government, let him perform this service as a temporary citizen of the said government, although he has to show all of the traits and ordinary signs of citizenship. These are enhanced by the spiritual manifestation of the dignified

association of the mortal man's mind and the divine spirit which resides in him. If the non-believer qualifies as a superior civic servant, one must seriously ask oneself if the roots of the truth in our hearts have not died from the lack water from living spiritual communion with social service.

"The awareness of being children of god must quicken the entire life of service to your fellows. You must not be passive mystics or remote ascetics. Do not turn into dreamers or wealthy weather vanes who fall into a comfortable lethargy where a fictitious Providence is going to provide everything for them, including the life's necessities.

"You truly must be gentle in your dealings with the mortals who are wrong, patient in conversations with ignorant people, composed when faced with provocation.... Yet you must be brave in the hour of defending your honor and stalwart in spreading the truth and even audacious in preaching the kingdom's gospel. Thus you will reach the ends of the Earth...

"This gospel is a living truth. I have told you it is like yeast in bread or a mustard seed. Now I declare it's a living seed that will continue being the same seed generation after generation, flawlessly spreading in new forms and growing in an acceptable manner adapting itself to the unique needs and conditions of each generation. The revelation I have made is a living revelation." The Galilean emphasized these last two words with an indescribable force.

"A living revelation," he emphasized. "And it is my desire that it will bring forth fruit fit for every individual and each generation in accordance with the laws of spiritual growth. It is my wish for it to increase and develop. From generation to generation, this gospel must manifest a growing vitality and a greater depth of spiritual power. It must not be allowed to become a simple holy memory, a mere tradition about me or about the time in which we now live..."

That piercing look as sharp as a dagger passed over each and every one of the listeners. And when it arrived at me, Jesus repeated, "Do not let it become a simple holy memory, a mere tradition about me or about the time in which we now live..."

Then he lowered his voice to a calmer tone and continued. "And don't forget that we are not leading a personal attack on individuals or against the authority of those who sit in Moses' chair. We have only offered them a new light, which they have vigorously rejected. We assail them solely for their spiritual disloyalty, since these are the same truths they profess to teach and safeguard. We clash with these established leaders and renowned managers only when they directly oppose the preaching of the gospel. Even now we are not the ones who lash them, yet they seek our destruction.

"You are not to attack the old traditions. You must cleverly apply the leavening from the new Truth in between the old beliefs and let the Spirit do its own work. Let controversy come only when those whom I despise force it upon you. When non-believers intentionally attack you, do not hesitate to staunchly defend the Truth which is sanctified and has saved you.

"Remember to always love one another. Do not fight with people, not even non-believers. Practice mercifulness, especially on those who scornfully abuse you. Be loyal citizens, honorable artisans, praiseworthy neighbors, devoted relatives, understanding parents, and sincere believers in fellowship of the spiritual kingdom. I assure you that my spirit will be with you now and always until the end of the world."

Between the sixth and the ninth hours (in our current timekeeping system it would be 13:00 hours), Jesus concluded his speech. The Greeks who attended the meeting were the ones who asked the most questions. From my point of view, these gentiles had assimilated the Rabbi's intentions and teachings better than his own apostles had.

The eleven had barely opened their mouths. Furthermore, judging from the comments they made as we descended into the campground, they did cease thinking about the connection between martyrdom, persecution, and death, which were heralded by the Rabbi, and the inevitable propagation of the gospel throughout the world. They (with the exception of John Zebedee) were so convinced that the "kingdom" Jesus mentioned had a lot in common with a political system that would liberate Israel from foreign domination, that they could not understand how the diffusion of the "Truth" could occur 'without the promulgation by secular laws' as the Teacher had commanded. Their minds had plunged into endless doubt and speculation, again.

For the majority of the audience, the Rabbi's final words about the Jewish leaders who sought their destruction were interpreted as a great tragedy that was on the brink of destroying the world. Although they knew about the Sanhedrin's order to hunt down Jesus, their faith in the Galilean's powers was such that they resisted admitting that the priests could even touch him.

"At their other opportunities, the Teacher outwitted them," they said to each other in a simple effort to console themselves. "Why wouldn't he do this now? It is almost certain that the "destruction" Jesus mentions is a cataclysm or the end of the world..."

The impression the disciples held that morning were fueled by Jesus attitude. With the exception of the brief chat with Joseph from Arimathea, the Nazarene had been in an excellent mood.

"If the Teacher feared for his safety," they reasoned with sound logic, "he would not have adopted such a happy and carefree manner."

(At this juncture in my story, I want to insist on calling attention to something I previously alluded to but, given its importance, I think it should be reconsidered. Jesus of Nazareth's sermon had lasted more than two hours. I have mentioned only the only passages that I found the most interesting. Very well. The same thing was done in the gospels of the New Testament. None of them attains a minimum of comprehensiveness and rigor. In the evangelical texts, it seems some phrases or sentences, at best, are lost here and there, and disconnected from what was in fact a whole, uniform, perfectly structured context. For me these serious deficiencies, which are repeated in other chapters—are not a consequence of negligence on the part of the sacred writers. The only reason the Canonical Gospels do not echo those teachings is actually much simpler, yet not less unfortunate. From my perspective, when the evangelists tried to put Jesus life, works, and sermons in writing, enough time had passed so that the immense majority of his teachings could not be recalled verbatim. If it were not for my system of filming—thereby recording it—even I would not have been able to memorize everything I heard. I must reiterate something I do not fully understand: why none of the disciples was concerned about taking notes on everything they saw and heard. Basically, today we are prepared for a wider and more suitable vision of what the Teacher from Galilee said and did.)

On a personal level, for me some of the statements Jesus made at the peak of Mount Olivet on that unforgettable morning have assumed a greater significance. For example, I never could forget the allusions to the hope that 'The persistent preaching of this gospel will someday bring nations to a new and incredible liberation...' as he promised. How I long to see the

fulfillment of that statement! However, day by day, this marvelous reality still seems far away... If Jesus was able of predicting (forty years ahead!) the total destruction of Jerusalem by Titus' legions, why was he going to be wrong about this other prophecy?

I was also baffled by his recommendation as to the way the Truth should be promulgated. 'You must not seek to spread this truth through the secular laws' he had insisted. A piercing doubt remained in my heart: would the Son of Man have approved of the intricate tangle of laws, rules, and codes which have governed and still govern the destinies of the churches that are fundamentally nothing but asphyxiating secular bureaucracies crouched beneath more or less obvious spiritual and sacred pretexts? But my mission was not to judge, but to observe and give an eyewitness account. I beg whoever reads this diary to forgive me...

As soon as we entered the campsite, David Zebedee had the food ready. I noticed he was nervous and bad-tempered. At first, I attributed this to our delay. Normally lunch occurred in the middle of the day usually around noon. I thought Zebedee's disgust was more than justified. Once again, I was wrong. The head of the emissaries' irritation was from waiting for the group.

We made ourselves comfortable around the fire and the women began to serve the meal. It was a lentil-based stew flavored with "pinches" of black cumin, fresh shoots of cilantro¹ that had been passed lightly through the fire; toasted grain which John Mark had provided, and a small serving of cottage cheese made from goat's milk by the women. In addition, besides the wine, there were flat wheat cakes made from a base of salt and water which had been kneaded early that morning.

The procedure the women at the camp used to prepare these cakes which were about 12 centimeters in diameter was very strange—at least to me. They utilized an "oven", if you can call it that, which consisted of a large clay jug whose exterior was perfectly coated with mud. The soil ensured that the inside and the outside of the container would not burn in the fire. A fire was lit inside the jug. When the flames had heated the walls of the jar sufficiently, the women quenched the flames and stuck the cakes on the inner surface of the "oven." Usually the cakes were eaten hot. But by the time Jesus and the rest of the disciples arrived at the orchard, the cakes had cooled. However, some of the diners rectified this mishap by drizzling honey on the cakes.

Jesus barely tasted the lentil stew, before he devoted his attention to the cottage cheese and his ration of seedless grapes. Judas appeared at the campground in the middle of lunch. No one was surprised. Only Jesus, David Zebedee, and I followed him with our eyes. With downcast eyes, Judas Iscariot took a wooden bowl and served himself a generous helping of lentils. In the same silence in which he had entered the orchard, he withdrew and isolated himself by sitting on the roots of the closest olive tree. The traitor focused on his food for a long time. As soon as he finished, he proceeded to pick his teeth with a blade of grass while he raised his eyes to the sky towards the sun. (I suppose he was attempting to establish how many hours of daylight remained.) And there he stayed, watching the Galilean's and his associates' every move.

¹ Cilantro or *coriandrum sativum* is an herb from the parsley family is an herb which is better known as coriander in the west due to the similarity of the strong scent it releases when it is harvested to the smell of bedbugs. Once it is dried, it becomes very aromatic. The type used by the Israelis was golden yellow and the size of a peppercorn. It is a mild stimulant, but is still an aphrodisiac like cumin. From what I could see, many Hebrews mixed the latter with honey and pepper and took it twice a day. They said this kept them sexually aroused [Major's note].

It must have been an hour short of three o'clock in the afternoon when David Zebedee, who was growing more restless by the minute, stood up and practically threw himself at Jesus before he walked with him to the tents. They talked for a few minutes and I observed how the Teacher responded at one instant by raising his left hand in an effort to calm David. Judas followed the scene impassively without moving away from his place.

When David returned to the group, I tried to coax him. "What happened to you?" I asked him, lowering my voice so the rest of the group could not hear it.

"My men in Jerusalem have brought bad news..." he explained in despair.

I began to surmise what it was about and what the real reason was for the disciple's escalating agitation.

"They followed Judas and just as all of you foresaw, the plans for the Teacher's capture are almost complete. It will be today, probably after sunset. The Temple's police captain is furious about Lazarus' escape and is pressuring Iscariot for what he knows in order to carry out the arrest."

"Do you know where it will happen?"

"No. I only know we cannot let this bastard out of our sight," David muttered as he glared at Judas.

"And what did Jesus say?"

Zebedee shrugged his shoulders and continued exuding evident surprise that he had provoked the Galilean's censure. "He asked me not to discuss this with anyone. But I can tell you, since you already know...he said, 'Yes, David. I know everything. And I know that you know, but take care not to tell anyone.' When I tried to persuade him to flee, he added, 'Don't you doubt that god's will shall prevail in the end?' I swear I don't understand him, Jason. If he wanted to, we could have more than one hundred armed men at his service who would guard and escort him right now, as soon as they arrived from Perea."

I put my hands on his shoulders just as I had seen Jesus do and tried give him an encouraging look. Yet this man's sorrow was much deeper than I had supposed. Suddenly one of the "couriers" arrived and pulled David away from his gloomy thoughts. I accompanied him to the men's tent and there in the presence of John Zebedee, the emissary—who came from Philadelphia—read a message from Abner. The persistent rumors about a plot to kill the Teacher had even reached that remote eastern city. They asked for instructions 'Should they mobilize all of their people and set out for Jerusalem?'

Zebedee read the missive and immediately went to the Galilean. Once he was acquainted with the note from the man who had given Lazarus protection, he dictated to David: "Tell Abner to carry on with his work. If I walk away from you in the flesh, it is because I can return in spirit. I will not abandon you. I will be with you until the end."

Another one of the messengers left at a run toward Philadelphia. I used this opportunity to ask Zebedee about Jesus' mother. It was nearly the ninth hour (3pm), yet Mary and her family had not shown any signs of life. As I said, the possibility of meeting the Galilean's mother face-to-face had excited my spirit and filled me with curiosity. What was she really like? Would she

resemble the person depicted in the traditional universal image? What was the truth about all of those qualities and virtues that had been endlessly riveting the Mariology scholars and researchers? David could not satisfy my doubts.

The journey from Bethsaida in Galilee, to Jerusalem was approximately sixty stadia (about 110 kilometers) and I assume it involved a considerable effort especially with a party that included several women¹.

I had to wait. David had scarcely left Jesus' presence, when the corps' leader, Philip, approached the Teacher. "Since the hour for Passover Seder is coming soon, where would you like us to prepare the dinner?" he asked.

"Go look for Peter and John," the Galilean replied, "and give them the instructions for the Seder we will have together tonight."

Judas was exceedingly interested in this matter. He stood up and started walking towards Jesus. I suppose he intended to find out where and when we were going to have dinner on Thursday. But Zebedee, who did not lose sight of Judas, understood Iscariot's dark intentions and blocked his way with admirable reflexes. Judas nervously watched as Philip, Peter, John and the Teacher walked away from the rest of the group and entered one of the empty tents. The apostles exited the tent within minutes, left the orchard without the briefest comment, and walked down the hill.

I hesitated for a moment. What should I do? Should I join the group of apostles who were about to leave the campground or stay with the Teacher? David continued obstructing Judas' path. Iscariot's forlorn face did not lose its cold-blooded aspect even as he seemed resigned to his luck. I followed my instincts and, with a reserved demeanor, rushed after Philip and his companions. I caught up with them as they were crossing over to the other side of Cedron along the city's southeastern wall near the Essene Gate. On seeing me, the disciples were somewhat surprised. I attempted to dispel their suspicions by saying I meant to thank the Teacher for his hospitality by giving him a present at the upcoming Passover celebration².

"I saw you leaving for Jerusalem and I thought it would be a good opportunity to ask for your advice," I explained.

Only John, who was the most sensible and the most observant of all his friends, was touched by my gesture. He took me by the arm.

"And what have you thought about giving him?" he inquired.

"Perhaps a new tunic," I improvised

¹ The route commonly used at that time, which went from the town of Bethsaida (Bethsaida Julias) to Jerusalem, forced one to pass through the towns of Kursi and Hippos on the eastern shore of Lake Gennesaret then on to Garada and Apamea and from there follow the shore of the Jordan River to Jericho, Bethany, and finally Jerusalem. The other route which passed through the middle of Samaria, was not recommended due to the continual clashes between inhabitants of Judea, Galilee, and the Samaritans [Major's note].

² The Jewish custom at that time was to give gifts in order to fully comply with the requirement to be joyful at Passover. These were presented to friends, relatives, and especially women. Although this did not apply to me given my status as a gentile, I considered the pretext very suitable for my purposes [Major's note].

“That is not a bad idea,” he pondered aloud, “but it might be more practical to buy a mantle. He has a high regard for his tunic. Did you notice that it was handmade without seams...?”

I told him it was an excellent idea and that if he had a few minutes at this disposal, would recommend a good mercer and go there with me. Peter intervened in a brusque tone as though he was being dragged along by a bad mood. However, he did reveal exactly what I wanted to know.

“Listen, Jason. It can’t be now. The Teacher has entrusted us with a rather odd task...”

From his voice, I sensed an almost genetic inability to understand many of Jesus’ actions.

“We must go to the city gates and look for a man with a pitcher of water...” he exclaimed in a ringing tone. “Imagine doing that with thousands of pilgrims in Jerusalem!”

John reproached him for having so little faith. “If the Teacher told us to go through the gates and find the man with a jug, then there is nothing further to discuss.”

“But, acknowledge that Peter does have a good reason, Philip rationalized. “Wouldn’t it have been much easier and efficient, if Jesus had given us directions to the house he wanted us to use for Seder tonight or the name of its owner? Why is so much mystery necessary? Why must it be a puzzle?”

I smiled to myself as I recalled the evangelical text that narrates this incident. The authors of the Holy Scriptures had not mentioned the quarrel among the disciples in its beautiful portrayal of blind faith and logical doubts. (It is possible that many years later, neither Peter nor Philip wanted the fledgling Christian community to discover his weakness of spirit. This is quite human and understandable.)

The three men were entangled in this dispute until we arrived at the threshold of the great Essene Gate that faces the Valley of Hinnom. At this hour in the afternoon, the crowds of people continually entering and exiting the gates to Jerusalem were large enough to discourage anyone trying to locate a “man with a pitcher of water.”

Suddenly, John called our attention to a group of women who were leaving the city in the confused human traffic. Two of them were carrying a jug on their heads. The rest who were probably laundresses balanced wicker baskets full of clothes on their craniums with consummate skill. But Peter who was becoming increasingly disheartened, made the young disciple see that they were women and besides, they were going in the opposite direction to the one the Rabbi had mentioned. After we passed through the enormous gate’s stone arch, the three disciples stopped in front of the first houses in the lower district. For several minutes they concentrated on scrutinizing the people who strolled by that place.

It did not take them long to discover a man seated on the right side of the Essene Gate with his back against the wall. There was a pitcher sitting beside him that was almost half a meter tall and was the type used to collect water from the fountain in front of Jerusalem. The disciples silently watched him. John smiled and resolutely advanced until he was two meters from the individual. Philip followed and Peter vacillated before eventually joining his friends, systematically shaking his head the entire time. Neither John nor anyone else in the group separated their lips.

The man seemed bored of waiting. When he saw them standing there motionlessly with their eyes fixed on him, he smiled faintly and without any further ado, stood, and picked up his heavy jug. Once the container was securely fastened to his left hip, he immediately commenced his hurried journey. Now Peter who was still silent with his eyes cast downwards, turned red from shame. In a question of minutes, this mysterious person lead us through the steep narrow streets of southern Jerusalem to a two-story house located very near Annas' residence. Annas was the former high priest and Caiaphas' father-in-law.

At the door to this mansion, which was as luxurious as Joseph Arimathea's, awaited someone who was known to all of us: the little John Mark! Apparently, I was not the only one who was surprised. On seeing the adolescent, the three disciples exchanges glances guessing that this was Jesus' intention. For my part, the supposed miraculous encounter with the man who had a pitcher began to have a more rational explanation. At that moment, I did not have adequate evidence; nonetheless, a presentiment began to circulate inside me. Had the teacher given John Mark instructions during their long walk on Wednesday to pass on to a member of his family—even to a servant—to show up at a predetermined time at the gates of Jerusalem carrying a pitcher of water? If it had not been that way, how could one explain the boy's presence at the doorstep to the house where we were going to observe the so-called Last Supper?

This theory was gaining ground in my subconscious mind. Essentially all of it fit: the youth's iron like muteness in response to the disciples' questions and the Teacher's extreme caution when it was time to reveal the place where he wanted to gather with his closest friends. Jesus of Nazareth was current with the conspiracy whose main protagonist was Judas, as well as the tactics to facilitate his capture. It was logical that the Galilean would take the necessary precautions if he did not wish to be bothered during this dinner. Evidently, this maneuver formed a part of his plan.

The young Mark escorted us inside the house and introduced us to his parents Elijah and Mary. Based on what I was able to find out this family was related to Jesus by marriage. He shared all of his teachings with them. Philip who was responsible for preparing the dinner, asked Elijah Mark to show him the venue and to bring him up to date with the menu and the rest of the preparations. I prudently refrained from asking the owners of the house any questions about my theory since the boy was still present. However, after establishing that the dinner would be held on the second floor of the Mark's mansion, my doubts about the secret agreement between Jesus and their son was practically dissolved. All that remained was for me to confirm it with the boy or his parents. This would happen a few hours later...

I was prepared to follow Philip and Peter to the first floor in order to commence one of the delicate assignments for the Trojan Horse project, when John the Evangelist unexpectedly proposed that we take advantage of this time to visit the nearby dyers' guild and satisfy my wish to purchase a mantle for the Teacher. I was trapped by my own deceit. I had no alternative but to accept and feign my great delight with the disciple's gentility.

We went down a narrow alley that was badly paved with cobblestoned pestilence and led to a circle of small single story houses located at a southeast corner of the city under the shade of the exterior city wall. These thirty houses were actually other dyers' factories. John led me inside of one of them that was owned by his old friend Malkiyias who was an expert artesian and a worthy descendant of an ancient family of dyers. Without any purpose in mind, I was inside a dimly lit room that was approximately six meters by three meters and virtually smothered by the darkness. I discerned two big vats almost a meter in diameter and another meter high at one end of the room. There were sundry low piles in the background and a bench built from rubble.

Potash had been placed in the vat and softened with lime as well as a small quantity of indigo¹ in one vat and double that amount in the other. Each vat could be closed with a stone cover that had a small orifice or mouth about fifteen centimeters wide in the center of the top. It was there that the good friend Malkiyias inserted thread for the different weaves before he proceeded to dye them.

Numerous workers manipulated huge panels of fabric that were submerged in a scarlet and purple bath. John explained my wish to give a present to a friend and asked him to show us the best made mantles and those which were about to be transferred to the mercer's guild. The boss of the dye factory accepted with pleasure and displayed an abundant assortment of clothes, woolen tunics, cotton tunics, mantles for women (which were very similar to shawls) and fine garments made with Egyptian threads and all dyed in a wide variety of attractive colors. Precipitously, as I was perusing these garments, I had an idea. I searched through the most delicate weaves and pointed out a white linen mantle to John.

"This one...I want to take this one."

The disciple eyed me with astonishment. "But Jason, this is a mantle for a woman," he remarked.

"I know," I replied, "but I ended up with a better idea."

John respected my silence and settled on a price with the master artesian for the luxurious mantle without asking me a simple question about the abrupt change. Although this type of commercial transaction was prohibited—because the dyers could not sell their products directly to the public—the friendship between John and Malkiyias served to circumvent that problem.

At about four o'clock on the afternoon, we picked up Philip and Peter. John Mark, who wanted to accompany us as we started out on the path back to the campground at Gethsemane, joined us. Everything was ready for the Seder at the Marks' family's house. Circumstances prevented me from obtaining access to the second floor and this began to worry me. It was vital to the complete fulfillment of my mission for me to enter that room before it was occupied by Jesus and the twelve...

When David Zebedee saw us coming, he rushed to interrogate me while Peter, Philip and John communicated everything about the Last Supper to Jesus. The astute David mentioned that given the circumstances, he had suggested to Judas that he handover some of the money since he was going to use it to cove the groups' necessities.

"To my surprise," he added, "the bastard not only offered no resistance, but even gave me all of the liquid funds and the receipts for the cash deposits. 'You're right,' he says to me without faltering, 'There is something being woven against the Teacher and in case something happens to me, you will not be bothered by anyone.' What is he talking about Jason," he inquired dejectedly. "This cynic was on the verge of confessing to me that he feared for Jesus' life."

This action by Judas, namely rushing to relinquish all of the movement's money, underscored my suspicion even more that the traitor was not behaving wholly from greed.

¹ Judging from its blue color and shapes of the light square cloths that weighed about 125 grams, each one of the dye pastes must have been Indian indigo which was highly prized in the art of tinting[Major's note].

It was five o'clock in the evening barely an hour before sunset. I noticed an unaccustomed commotion at the campsite. Philip informed me that the Teacher was in a hurry to leave for Jerusalem. The apostles did not fully understand why the Teacher organized the small unusual Seder that only he and his twelve trusted men could attend. Their comments were very diverse.

The Jewish tradition strictly requires that the Passover meal be held after the obligatory lamb or young goat was sacrificed in the Temple on the eve of Passover.¹ This year Passover fell on a Saturday, this made it twice as solemn. If the traditional religious meal was going to take place tomorrow after dark on April 7, it was logical for the disciples to ask questions about the mysterious banquet the Galilean had organized for Thursday night. Only a few of them: John, Judas Iscariot, and of course David Zebedee, guessed that this dinner was going to be a very special event prior to the Teacher's immediate and devastating capture. For me, Jesus' urgency in abandoning the orchard was a sign that prompted me to distance myself and move ahead of the group.

Given the unique character of the Last Supper, which only Jesus and his twelve disciples could attend, the Trojan Horse Project had decided that my presence would break the intimate atmosphere that the Teacher intended. It was unethical for me to sit next to the thirteenth guest. Still, the mission could not miss such an event as transcendental and momentous as this one. I had to collect the maximum amount of information about what really happened on the second floor of the Marks' house. For this, General Curtiss had prepared an intermediate solution: in addition to my investigations of the protagonists, every word spoken by Jesus and the twelve apostles would be recorded with a tiny, sensitive microscope that I would hide in a strategic location in the Cenacle. (I could hardly guess that this miniscule electronic marvel—built with extreme miniaturization by the experts at ATT (American Telephone and Telegraph) the American enterprise that exploits telephony—for our project would be of the reasons the Trojan Horse Project would advise for a second “grand journey” to Christ's era.)

After depositing the mantle I had purchased at Malkiyias' the dyers in Zebedee's hands, I rushed out to pick some bunches of the lavender and purple and white iris that grew near the olive grove. As I ran toward Jerusalem along the shortest path, I alerted the module that I was about to put the microphone and “Moses staff” in Elijah Mark's home. The gracious and placid head of the household was not in the least surprised when I announced that Jesus and the twelve would not be long in coming and that I wanted to contribute a humble but fragrant decoration for the table as a token of my friendship with and affection for the Teacher.

My plan had the desired effect. Elijah directed one of the servants to escort me to the upper level. We ascended a narrow stone staircase and opened a double door, then my improvised “guide” invited me to proceed. As I did, I entered a spacious rectangular hall just over twenty meters long by six or seven meters wide. A low U-shaped table had been placed in the middle of the room. Its features were very similar to the one I had seen in Simon the Leper's house. Thirteen divans were oriented almost perpendicular to the table. Whoever occupied the central

¹ The observance of the Jewish Passover is also called *Hag Hamatzot* or “The Feast of Unleavened Bread”. It is celebrated annually on the fifteenth day of Nisan which corresponds to the full moon or the spring full moon. In the year 30 this date, the fifteenth of Nisan, fell on Saturday April 8. The unblemished lamb was sacrificed the day before Passover, on the fourteenth day of Nisan, and the family ate it after dark, which on this occasion was Friday April 7. Therefore, the Galilean held the Last Supper on the thirteenth day of Nisan or Thursday April 6. Nisan is the first month of the year on the Jewish calendar. It corresponds to our March or April [Major's note].

seat at the base of the “U” would be somewhat higher than the rest. I immediately deduced this place was destined for the invited guest of honor which is to say, Jesus. One of the divans, which closely resembled a bench with four feet, but without a back or arms, was much lower than the rest. This one was located at one of the far ends of the table. When I saw it, I concluded that the host had a problem obtaining so many chaise lounges.

To the left of the dining room (I always use the only entrance into the room as a reference point), I counted three bronze sinks meticulously reinforced with a limestone bases and practically stuck to the brick wall. Each sink was elevated on a wooden platform with wooden feet. Curiously, all of them were wheeled. Hence, these receptacles which were shallow and measured about forty centimeters in diameter could be conveniently moved from one part of the room to another. The owner of the house had placed several pitchers of water as well as some washbasins and linen cloths for drying next to these sinks.

The light entered the slender windows which were nearly embrasures distributed along the walls. It was so dim that the servants were obliged to light the oil lamps. In a swift assay, I noted six or seven semi-detached chandeliers on the walls and something a meter and a half tall on the floor which did not produce enough light to illuminate the entire room. This defect was corrected with a square lantern that contained a triple hemp wick immersed in oil. This reinforcement was planted in the middle of the U-shaped table and supported by a beautiful wrought iron stand which was a little over a meter from the floor. It supplied the table and its surroundings with a generous bright light.

The walls across from its glass surface were subtly tinted gold and the light from the lantern inundated the reddish divans and bathed the immaculate white mantel with yellow. At one end of the table, farthest from the “rolling” sinks, the servants had set out bread, wine, water, and numerous plates of pulses. The table was set for thirteen with fine ceramic plates decorated by an artisan’s brush with red and white stripes at each place. There were four crystal glasses from Sidon adjacent to the crockery for each guest. The presence of such a plethora of glassware led me to surmise that Jesus had decided to have the dinner according to the rites for Passover.

And above all of these decorations, the room shone with some red tapestries hung strategically on the walls. To the right of the door at an angle to the dining room, young Mark’s mother had applied a discreet beautifying touch with some colorful olive branches and palm leaves firmly set in basin with soil. After this dizzying survey of the room, I realized the ideal place to hide the multi-directional microphone was at the base of the lantern. From that location, it would be equidistant to all of the disciples so their voices would arrive clearly at the sensitive receiver.

But when I turned toward the door, the presence of the servant who had accompanied me made me abandon my plans. I had to be alone, even if it was only for a couple of minutes... Suddenly I noticed the flowers I still held in my left hand. I gave them to the servant and asked him to find a vase. The good man did not understand Greek, so I had to express myself in gestures. At last, he seemed to understand and he went downstairs to fulfill my request.

Without wasting a second, I knelt and held the microphone next to the lantern. Luckily, its iron base was also magnetic so the microphone stuck to it instantly. The fringe that hung from the lampshade formed an excellent camouflage. I moved backwards to the center of the table and walked quickly to the divan the Galilean would presumably occupy. I reclined on it, activating the auditory connection with the ship. Eliseo responded at once. For the space of several seconds,

I projected my voice at different volumes toward the lantern which was located a little more than three meters from the curve of the “U”. I repeated the sound test from the two far ends of the table. Eliseo confirmed the reception and announced that the sound had arrived “five by five.”¹

Somewhat reassured, I stood in the corner where Mary Mark had set the flower arrangement. In my opinion, this was the only angle from which it would have been possible to film the entire scene. But when I examined the view through the lens, I was able to register the surroundings, yet there were two obstacles that made the filming difficult. On one side, one of the palm fronds took up most of the visual field. On the other side, and this was not even that much of an inconvenience, the place that the Teacher would be was partly obscured by the lantern in the center of the table. I tried to calm down. I picked up the staff again and scanned every corner of the room. Soon I had to stop. There was not a single place to lean the staff without raising suspicions and guaranteeing that the filming would proceed successfully.

Now discouraged, I returned to the point I had first selected with the intention of putting “Moses staff” behind the palms and branches. At least, I said to myself, it will stay in the same place and film some of the main characters. In this case, my mission was simple: press the button that activated the filming and leave. Once the dinner was finished, and no complications arose, it would all be a question of coming up again and recovering it. But as soon as I stopped a few paces from the corner, the servant entered with room, ruining my plan.

He held a small earthenware vase with my flowers inside it. I had to force myself to smile. Almost automatically, I placed it on the table in front of the plate and the glasses designated for the Nazarene. And, feeling acutely vexed, I left that historic place. I was about to say farewell to the Marks’ family when the dry gruff sound of the Temple’s ram’s horns announced the end of the day. My aim was to hide near the house and wait for Jesus and his men to arrive. This way I could watch them and, more importantly, watch all of Judas’ actions. Yet the hospitable family would not let me go.

Elijah invited me to have a glass of wine and, if it would not disrupt my plans, to remain in his company until the rest of the group arrived from Gethsemane. Mark’s father knew about the Rabbi’s arrangements for the dinner—no one except for the thirteen men could participate in the Passover Seder. They would not even have servants. Regardless of how I hastened to remind him of the Teacher’s wish, the good man insisted it was unnecessary for me to be on the top floor. He would satisfy my appetite and, in the meantime, entertain me on the ground floor or in the small garden next to the house. I reflected and then accepted. Perhaps this would be the perfect location for my mission. After all, it was possible to monitor the actions of whoever went upstairs to or came downstairs from the dining room from the vantage of the lower level or the courtyard. Besides, this kind invitation enabled me to discover another curious fact: the menu for the Last Supper.

According to Jewish tradition, the main course was based on a single dish: the garnished lamb or kid. This was accompanied by a series of vegetables that were also required. Mary Mark had prepared several dishes with lettuce, fragrant chervil (it had a gentle aroma similar to anise), thistle called eryngo, and the essential bitter herbs. All of these were neither boiled nor cooked just as the law commanded.

¹ This expression is frequently used jargon from aeronautics that means that the sound has been received with perfect clarity [JJB’s note].

When I asked how the lamb was prepared, the matron guided me to the garden and showed me the pine wood coals that were perfectly confined in a fireplace by a base of large pebbles from the river. One of the servants made sure the flames were not extinguished while the other two were busy with the lamb which did not weigh more than eight or ten kilograms. With admirable skill, the servants had cut off the extremities and extracted all of the lamb's entrails. The entrails as well as the legs were perfectly skinned and purified with an aqueous solution. Later these parts were stuffed inside the lamb.

One of them took a number of shoots of fenugreek, laurel, pepper, and stuffed any hole in the lamb with them. They proceeded to close the belly with selected branches of rosemary that they then arranged around the outside of the lamb. The second servant inserted a long pomegranate stick into the lamb's mouth and ran it through the entire body until it came out of the anus. This done, each end of the pomegranate rod was wedged between two iron forks that were securely planted in the ground. Then it began a slow and thorough roast.

In compliance with the ancient ritual, before the servants put the lamb over the coals, the father of the family looked at the sky and checked if they were "between two the lights" just as it is specified in Exodus (12:6). The banquet was rounded off with leeks, peas, unleavened bread, and for dessert there were nuts and toasted almonds in an unleavened pastry made with dried figs. To ease the taste of the compulsory bitter herbs, little John Mark's mother had prepared a delicious compote or marmalade called *charoet* prepared with of wine, vinegar, and crushed fruit. The wine (the diners would drink at least four glasses of wine diluted with water) came from Mount Simeon and was extremely prestigious in Israel.

At about half past six, the youngest child, Mark, burst into the house like an exhalation. Sweating and panting he informed his father that the teacher was approaching the mansion. The family's joy and nervousness on receiving the Galilean and his men had no limit. There was total chaos for several minutes. Mary Mark went upstairs and downstairs constantly while the servants proceeded with the final preparations for the Seder.

The disciples—at Jesus' cue—were ascending the stairs and walking into the large room upstairs. From what I could see, no one was missing. Judas, who locked himself away in total muteness, followed his companions while Jesus chatted with the family. Judging by his humorous comments about the lamb, he continued to be in excellent spirits. Nothing seemed to be disturbing him. Nevertheless, from that moment, I stayed on full alert. Since Judas Iscariot had finally ascertained the location for the mysterious dinner, his thoughts could only be about the essentials for him and for the police who were doubtlessly expecting his information. Namely, for him to leave Mark's house and go to the Temple in order set the operation for the Nazarene's arrest in motion. Towards seven o'clock, Jesus left them and went up to the Cenacle. His face still reflected great joviality.

From that moment, I stood in the doorway that lead into the garden and guarded the few meters from the stairs to the first floor. Soon the helpful John Mark brought me a small stool at his father's suggestion. I sat down as did he, and we looked at each other in silence. I gradually cleared the plate of cooked fish the women of the house had served me, and without much hope for success, began to question the boy. Despite his young age, John possessed a deep sense of loyalty and he loved Jesus more than anything else in the world. So one after another, my questions crashed against this kid's zealous silence. Eventually, when I dared to explain my theory about the secret agreement between him and the Rabbi about the jug of water and the subsequent plans for the dinner, John Mark paled. In an instantaneous fit of impetuosity, he

stood up and fled to the back of the garden. His attitude had unwittingly betrayed him. However, I did not wish to force the issue.

Approximately one hour after the dinner had started, the twins James and Judas Alpheus, appeared on the staircase. I rose. But as I saw them enter the courtyard and pick up the wooden tray containing the pre-cub lamb, I relaxed. They looked serious. Curiosity assailed me again. What was happening upstairs? Why were the brothers' faces, which were usually grinning, shadowed by anguish? The Mark family's constant presence prevented me from consulting the module. I decided to compose myself. I would have time to investigate.

A smiling and a little calmer, John Mark collected my plate. In my attempt to be friendly, I switched from the topic of our previous conversation to something more congenial. By making Jesus the center of the conversation, the boy forgot his suspicions and told me what I already knew. Specifically that his passion for the Teacher had no limit and according to what he said, if necessary 'he would be the first to give his life for the Rabbi.'

I could not help it: as the night progressed, my nervousness increased. Until it was nearly nine o'clock and I saw Judas ultimately come downstairs. He was evidently in a hurry. Without even glancing at us, he opened the large doors at the entrance and left the house. I jumped up from my place at the door and watched how he went precipitously into the distance. Alarmed by my abrupt crouched position, John Mark asked me what happened. If my assumptions were correct, Iscariot was going to the Temple. This meant I would lose track of him fast. It was necessary to act quickly and intelligently. Suddenly, a solution occurred to me while the boy stared at me.

"Do you know Joseph of Arimathea's house?" I asked as I tried not to scare him.

John Mark nodded.

"Very well. Run there and tell Joseph to go to the Temple immediately. It is important for him or Ismael to meet with Judas..."

Without the slightest question or comment, this boy who had caught my concern, went down the street toward the Pool of Shiloh. I initiated a tenacious pursuit of the traitor without him noticing me. At that time of the night, the number of pedestrians had decreased drastically. With great difficulty, aided more by the moonlight than wretched dim oil lamps on the street, I followed Judas' quick gait to a single story shack on the edge of a slum in the Upper District.

Then Judas entered the house and left a few minutes later with another individual. Both of them advanced towards the western wall of the Temple. As I reached the Gentile's Courtyard, I saw Judas and his companion faraway in the distance. They entered the deserted esplanade and walked up the staircase which surrounded the sanctuary. Some of the twenty-one guards who worked the usual watch at the Temple permitted them to enter. They conferred a few seconds and two of the Levities escorted them further inside at once.

Obviously my worked ended there. I was confident that Arimathea or Ismael the Sadducee would know how to interpret my message to go to the Temple as soon as possible to spy on Judas' movements. I turned around and tried to orient myself for my journey back to the Mark's house. I was so preoccupied about the affair with Iscariot that I was not aware that I entered an empty alley without any type of illumination. Suddenly a bulk shot up on my left and blocked my way. I was paralyzed with fright. The moonlight shone on a short individual with a

profuse beard who slowly advanced toward me. A bluish reflection in one of his hands froze my blood. Without saying a single word, he lunged at me and dealt me a hard blow in the abdomen. But, the curved dagger broke off at its base and fell on the pavement with a metallic echo. The “snake skin” had saved me from a serious mishap.

The confused man looked at the broken blade, dropped the weapon’s handle, and stumbled and fell as he retreated, unable to believe what was happening. Within seconds, he disappeared down the narrow alley howling like crazy. Fortunately, the tear in my tunic was not too scandalous. I left that area at full speed.

I arrived at the door to the Marks’ home at a few minutes past ten o’clock. The possibility that Jesus and the eleven had already left the cenacle worried me. I did not want to alarm Eliseo by giving him an account of the painful incident with the thief. If, for example, the assailant had demanded the bag with the money instead of attacking, perhaps the situation would have been radically different. My possibilities for defense were almost nil and it was most likely that if this opportune bandit had taken the money provided by the Trojan Horse Project, it would have been much more lamentable that it went with the small case that contained the infrared contact lenses.

As soon as John Mark saw me, he ran to meet me. The Teacher and his guests were still on the second floor. I breathed a sigh of relief. According to the child’s report, Joseph of Arimathea received my message and instantly departed for the Temple. I thanked John Mark, and then he somewhat reluctantly obeyed his mother and went to bed. However, he was not going to sleep for very long...

At about half past ten, more or less, I heard a hymn. Elijah offered me a glass of wine with honey and pointing to the place where the canticle proceeded from, informed me that Jesus and the disciples were on the verge of finishing. The truth is I had never needed a glass of wine as much I did at that moment. He hurried to bring it. Indeed in a matter of seconds, at the end of the religious hymn, the apostles began to come downstairs. Jesus was the last one. At eleven o’clock at night, at least at that instant, they were much more relaxed than they had been that morning.

They said farewell to the family and set out on the road back to the campsite. As we crossed the deserted streets in the Lower District on the way to the Fountain Gate which is in the southern corner of Jerusalem, I managed to separate Andrew from the rest of the group. Once we had fallen behind them a short distance, I became interested in the dinner’s development. The manager of the apostles began to relate how much he as well as his companions were intrigued by Judas’ abrupt disappearance, especially the fact that he had not returned to the cenacle.

“When we first saw him leave, we all thought he was going to the first floor—maybe in search of provisions for the Seder. Others believed the Teacher had entrusted him with some errand.”

The disciples’ thoughts were accurate, although none of them had complete information about the conspiracy. On the other hand, with the exception of David Zebedee, no one had assisted with the Seder—neither Andrew nor any of the rest had known Iscariot had been dismissed as the group’s administrator and that the communal money was in the hands of the chief of the emissaries. Andrew continued with his story. He insisted that no one else entered the second floor of the Mark’s house, which from my perspective, perfectly clarified why the Nazarene had decided to wash his disciples feet.

The gospels offer an accurate version; Jesus performed this gesture to demonstrate the honorable virtue of humility. Nevertheless, what had been the “spark” or the final cause which prompted the teacher to implement the cited foot washing. Must it all have been due to Jesus’ pure and simple initiative? Yes and no... When I had visited the room where they were going to celebrate the Passover Seder, I saw the washstands, basins, and “towels” that were ready for the required hand and feet washing. The Jewish custom demands that hosts or their servants must wash diners before sitting at the table. This, I repeat, is the tradition.

However, the Teacher had given clear-cut orders: there were to be no servants on the upper floor. And this was proven when, according to my confirmation—the twins went downstairs on one occasion to pick up the roasted lamb. Very well, a controversy arose among the twelve...

“When we entered the cenacle”, Andrew resumed, “all of us realized there was water and wash basins for washing our hands and feet. But if the Rabbi had ordered that there were to be no servants in the room, who was going to be responsible for the obligatory ablution?”

I must confess that I had the same thought as the rest.

“I certainly would not fall so low as to help wash the others’ feet. That was a job for a servant...And everyone silently decided to overlook it and avoid any comment on the subject of cleansing. The atmosphere became dangerously charged, on top of that, the irritating manner of the personal ablutions was poisoned by another act that made us explode. It was tangled up in a bitter polemic. The Teacher had not finished ascending the stairs, before each one of us devoted ourselves to inspecting the divans.

“It was obvious that the place of honor, which corresponded to the highest divan, was located in the center of the room, and we fell into temptation again: Who was going to sit in the place next to Jesus? I suppose almost all of us thought the same thing: the Teacher would choose his favorite disciple. And that is what we were thinking when Judas unexpectedly went to the seat to the left of the one that had been reserved for the Rabbi, thereby declaring his intention to sit next to him as the “honored” guest. Iscariot’s attitude infuriated us, resulting in a disagreeable discussion.

“But Judas had already settled into the divan and John, in one of his outbursts, did likewise and seized the seat on the right side. You can imagine the general irritation. But, threats and protests were useless. Neither Judas, nor John were willing to yield. Perhaps my brother Simon was angriest. He felt hurt and cheated by his companions’ so called “indecent pride.” Visibly upset, he turned to the table and selected the last place, which was precisely the lowest divan.

“From that moment on, the rest of the disciples willingly sat where they could. You know Peter is a good man and he loves the Teacher intensely, but on this occasion his weakness was great. I know my brother and I know why he did that.”

“Why?” I encouraged him to be honest with me. Andrew needed to tell someone and so he unloaded on me.

“Stunned by jealousy, and John’s and Judas’ impertinent initiative, Simon did not hesitate to sit in the far corner of the table with a secret hope that when the Teacher entered, he would publically insist and that Simon abandon that divan and take Judas’ or John’s place. This way he

would occupy the place of honor thus giving credit to himself and leaving evidence of proud companions.

“When the Rabbi appeared, in the doorway, the twelve found themselves still involved in a full argument with mutual recriminations for what happened. On seeing him, there was an abrupt silence. Jesus paused for an instant in the doorway. His face was gradually growing more serious. Apparently, he had grasped the situation. Yet without making any comment, he headed to his place under my brother Peter’s desolate gaze. Those minutes were tense.

“Even so, Jesus recovered his characteristic gentleness and everyone felt a little easier. Soon the conversation sprang up again among some of the disciples on the divans about how, on account of an apparent lack of consideration on the part of the Marks’ family since they had not provided one nor several servants to wash our feet. Then Jesus cast a glance over the washstands, confirming that they had not been used. But he still said nothing. Thaddeus (James’ twin) proceeded to serve the first glass of wine while the Rabbi listened and watched in silence.

“As you know, the order of the tradition requires the guests to rise and wash their hands after drinking the first glass of wine. We know the Teacher is not very fond of these formalities, so we waited expectantly. To our general surprise, the Rabbi stood up and walked quietly to the jugs of water. We looked on with astonishment as, without any preamble, he removed his tunic and tied a linen cloth around his waist. Then he picked up a washbasin and the water and made a complete circle around the table until he arrived at the least honorific place. This was the one occupied by my brother.

“With extreme tenderness and humility he knelt as he prepared to wash Peter’s feet. On seeing this, the twelve stood as one man. Our stupor turned into shame. Jesus had undertaken a peon’s task, thereby reproaching us for our mutual lack of consideration and charity. John and Judas lowered their eyes. Apparently they were more pained about it than the rest of us—”

“Judas too?” I interrupted incredulously.

“Yes.” Andrew stopped walking and stared me. Once again, he asked, “Jason, you know something...What’s happening with Judas?”

I shrugged my shoulders trying to evade the problem. But the leader of the apostles persisted and, given the imminent arrest, I explained that I also had reservations about Iscariot’s loyalty. We continued on our way and as we crossed the Cedron, my companion left me for his own somber silence. I begged him to resume his story. Finally, Andrew relented.

“When Simon saw Jesus kneeling in front of him, his heart burned again and he protested vehemently. As I mentioned before, my brother loves the Teacher above everything and everyone. I suppose when Simon saw him as an insignificant servant who is ready to do what neither he nor we would have done, he realized his mistake and tried to dissuade Jesus. However, the Rabbi’s decision was irrevocable so Peter let him do it. Jesus washed our feet one by one. After Peter’s words, no one dared to protest. The Teacher worked around the table in the dramatic silence until he reached the last guest. Then he put on his tunic and returned to his seat.

“Did John and Judas remain on the Rabbi’s right and left, respectively?”

“Yes, no one moved from his seat with the exception of Judas who left the room shortly before the third glass of wine was served with a blessing.”

Our proximity to the campsite forced me to suspend this enlightening narration. However, many questions were still accumulating in my mind. How had the revelation about the traitor's identity been passed from Jesus to John? How was it possible the rest of the apostles had not heard it? Undoubtedly, this was the case, since no one was aware of Iscariot's machinations. There were only suspicions... It was vital for me to find an interval in the coming hours to question John.

At that instant, I was not excessively concerned about being acquainted with the Rabbi's teachings at the dinner. Eliseo had informed me that the recording and subsequent transmission had been flawless. I would have the opportunity to hear it in full when I returned to the module on Sunday morning. I must point out—for the umpteenth time—that the evangelists' transcription of these words is only a poor reflection of what he said that night on the so-called Holy Thursday. When one encounters these teachings and messages in their complete form, one realizes how, with the passage of centuries, the Churches have reduced the immense spiritual flux of the gathering with Jesus until it is almost a single mathematical formula¹.

It was approaching eleven o'clock at night when we entered the orchard. Andrew answered my last question, which did not revive his interest even though it was of the greatest importance to me. I asked him if Jesus had dined heavily. The disciple was visibly stunned. He reported that Jesus had eaten very little. He also said that the Teacher had not tried the delicious roasted lamb as he usually did.

According to him, the Galilean had only tasted some of the greens and legumes—including the bitter herbs as well as the unleavened bread, diluted wine, and presumably a little of the dessert. This data had indubitable value, especially in relation to the possible reactions of the Nazarene's body to the terrible long hours that lay ahead. To the torture, blood loss, exhaustion, and painful injuries, one can also add a notable lack of energy reserves because of the meager meal and a total fast from ten o'clock Thursday night onwards.

At the first opportunity, I transmitted the features, properties, and approximate volumes of the food Jesus had consumed at the Seder as well as the time the meal began and ended. (From my calculations, the Passover Seder started at around 8:00 pm or 8:30 pm and concluded an hour and a half later, more or less.) The "cradle's" main computer provided us with the following calorie table—always estimated—based on the aforementioned food which comprised Jesus' diet that night.

Given the fact that each of the four glasses of wine had been diluted with water, these were worth approximately three hundred calories². The handful of almonds and walnuts were the highest source of energy the Teacher had ingested. The computer calculated the total number of calories in this portion to be between 500 and 600. Since each gram of fat supplies about nine calories, Jesus of Nazareth's Last Supper gave him a total of about 750 calories. This energy intake was very low for someone with the physical characteristics of a giant. (Jesus' basal metabolism or the amount of energy his body needed daily to sustain life, without exercise, was

¹ The interesting content of Jesus of Nazareth's words and teachings during the Last Supper will appear in the next volume in which I relate the adventures of the American major in the course of his second "grand journey" to the year 30 [JJB's note].

² The volume of each glass was calculated to be 200 hundred cubic centimeters of which 100 calories were attributed to the water (a liter of water contributes about 700 calories) [Major's note].

also estimated by *Santa Claus* to be 1728 calories¹. In the event that the Teacher engaged in minimal physical activity—such as walking, etc.—the total average daily consumption rises to 3,000 or 3,500 calories.)

The women and the forty or fifty disciples who were waiting at the camp greeted the Teacher and his apostles with great joy. However, their enthusiasm did not take long to plummet. The cause, once again, was Judas. As they were checking if Iscariot was actually present at Gethsemane, some of the Nazarene's men started to suspect that the reference the Teacher made during the meal to an impending betrayal had much to do with the group administrator's disappearance. When John Zebedee heard the rumor, he momentarily forgot about his messengers and drew closer to the clique. Yet his attitude was still cautious. He listened as one speaker after another revealed what he knew.

Simon the Zealot, who was more nervous than the rest, led a group over to Andrew and began to harass him with questions. The leader of the group lacked information and limited his response to, 'I don't know where Judas is...But I'm afraid he has deserted us.' The dismay spread rapidly. Peter, the Zealots, Thomas, and James, among others, met in the tent to examine the situation and adopt the necessary security measures.

It was then that the young Mark appeared. He wore a white sheet. As soon as he saw me, he ran to meet me and begged me not to betray him. When I asked him why, he confessed that he had escaped from his house. On hearing that Jesus and the eleven had left the house, he got out of bed, quickly covered himself with the first thing he found, namely the linen canvas that served as his blanket. He had just arrived at the campsite. I was filled with admiration for this kid's sense of loyalty to the Galilean.

It is very likely that the Teacher was soon aware of the tense atmosphere that prevailed among his men.

"Friends and brothers," he appealed to them, "I don't have much time to be with you. I would like us to be alone in order to ask our heavenly father for the strength we need in this hour and to continue the work that we must do in his name."

The disciples followed the Greeks as they climbed up to the rocky platform in the center of the peak of Mount Olivet. Once we were there, he asked us to kneel around him. I remained standing because I was filming this impressive scene at that time.

Bathed in moonlight, the giant raised his eyes to the stars and proclaimed in a thunderous voice, "Father my time has come! Glorify your son so your son can glorify you. I know you have given me complete authority over all living creatures in my kingdom and you will give eternal life to those who, by faith, are Children of God. Eternal life is why my people recognize you as the only true god and the father of all. They believe in the one who you sent to this world. Father, I exalted you on Earth and completed the work you gave me. I have nearly finished teaching the children about our creation. All that remains is for me to sacrifice my human life."

"Now glorify me Father, with the glory I had before this world existed, and receive me once again on your right side." Jesus paused briefly while his hair began to stir in the wind, which

¹ The calculation for Jesus' basal metabolism is as follows: 40×1.8 square meters of total surface area \times 24 hours = 1728 calories. When I refer to "calories" the word "kilocalories" is understood [Major's note].

was growing stronger. “I have placed your manifesto before the men you have chosen on Earth and whom you have given me.”

He proceeded, “They are yours since all life is in your hands. I have lived with them, taught them the rules of life, and they have believed. These men know everything I have come from you and this incarnation of my life is meant to inform the world about my father. I have revealed the truth you have given me and they—my friends and ambassadors—have sincerely wanted to receive your word. I have told them I have descended from you, that you sent me to Earth, and that I am ready to return to you...

“Father, I pray for all of these chosen men. I pray for them, not as I do for the world, but as men who have chosen to represent me after I have returned to you. These men are mine. You gave them to me. I cannot stay in this world any longer. I am going to return to the work you have entrusted in me. It is necessary for me to leave these companions behind to represent us and our kingdom among humanity.

“Father preserve their fidelity while I prepare to leave this human life. Help them to be united in spirit as you and I are united. These are my friends. During my stay with them, I could guide and watch over them, but now I am going to depart. Father stay with them until we can send them a new instructor to comfort and console them. You have given me twelve men and I have kept them all except for one who has not wished to continue his communion with us. These men are fragile and weak, but I know you can count on them. I have tested them and I know they love me. In spite of suffering a lot for my sake, I wish for them to keep their vision.

“The world may hate them as it has hated me, but I don’t ask you to remove them from the world, only to free them from the evil in this world. Sanctify them in truth. Your word is the truth. Just as you have sent me into this world, I am going to send them throughout the world. For I have lived among men and devoted my life to your service, in order to inspire them so that they would be purified in the truth and the love I have shown them.

“My Father, I know very well it is unnecessary to beg you to watch over them after my departure. I know you love them as much as I do. I am doing this so they will better understand that the father loves mortals the same as he loves his son. I have a fervent wish to show my earthly brothers the glory I enjoyed at your side prior to the creation of the world for they know so little about it...

“Oh righteous Father, I know you and I know you have made yourself known to these believers who will make your name known to other generations. For now, I promise that you will be as close to them in the world as you are to me.”

He concluded by raising his long arms to the heavens, “I am the bread of life... I am the living water... I am the light of the world... I am the desire of all ages...I am the open door to eternal salvation... I am the reality of the life without end... I am the good shepherd... I am the path of infinite perfection... I am the resurrection and the life...I am the secret of eternal life... I am the way, the truth, and the life... I am the infinite father of my unlimited children... I am the true vine and you are the stems... I am the hope for all of those who know the living truth... I am the living bridge from one world to the other... I am the living union between time and eternity...”

After a few minutes of silence, the Galilean asked his people to stand and he embraced them one by one. When he reached me, his eyes were brimming with tears. Soon after, the group

returned to the campsite. David Zebedee and John Mark were near Jesus and tried in vain to convince him to leave Jerusalem. From that moment, which was almost at midnight, the Rabbi's customary good humor vanished. In words, which faltered due his deep emotion, the Teacher urged his disciples to go to sleep. The apostles reluctantly went to the tent or their usual sleeping places.

But before that, when the Nazarene requested for John, James, and Peter to "stay with him a little longer", Simon the Zealot went very secretly to one side of the men's tent and opened a huge bundle. There were swords! The remaining eight apostles went to the Zealot's call and girded themselves with the weapons, all except for one: Bartholomew.

He rejected the combat equipment and exclaimed, "My brothers, the Teacher has said many times that his kingdom is not of this world and his disciples must not fight with the sword to establish it. In my opinion, I think and believe the Teacher does not require us to use weapons to defend it. We have all witnessed his power and we know he can defend himself from his enemies if he so desires. If he does not wish to resist, it is because this course of action represents his intent to fulfill his father's will. For my part, I will pray, but I will not take up my sword."

When Andrew heard Bartholomew, he put his sword back. If I was not mistaken, a total of eight or nine apostles were wearing a sword at that time. All of them, except for Bartholomew, Andrew, and John (however, this latter one was not very decided).

At last, the clearly exhausted apostles and disciples retired as they set up a watch with a strict rotation consisting of two armed men posted at the gates to the campsite. From what I could gather, the group was persuaded that the Teacher's arrest by the chief priests would not take place until the following morning. Consequently, they went to sleep with the intention of waking up early in the morning prepared for the worse.

John, Peter, and James sat around the fire waiting for Jesus, who had called David Zebedee and asked him for his fastest messenger. David returned immediately with Jacob who had the position of night courier between Jerusalem and Bethsaida.

The Nazarene said to him, "Go at once to Abner's house in Philadelphia and tell him this: The Teacher sends his wish for peace. Also tell him the time has arrived for me to be delivered to my enemies and I will be killed..."

The emissary paled, but Jesus proceeded impassively, "Also say, that I will be raised from the dead and I will appear to him before I return to my father. Then I will give him instructions about when the new teacher will come to dwell in your hearts."

David and I looked at each other. Then Jesus implored Jacob to recite the messaged and, when he was satisfied, he dismissed him with these words.

"Don't be afraid. Tonight an invisible messenger will run beside you."

While Zebedee had finalized the "courier's" departure, Jesus went to the Greeks who were camped next to the stone barrel from the oil mill and said farewell to them. I remained seated very close to Peter, John, and James. In spite of the apostles' efforts, their eyelids began to droop and their heads nodded. The Teacher returned to the fire and as he prepared to go deeper into the olive grove with his close friends, David detained him briefly. His quavering voice and teary eyes indicated that he had correctly guessed this was the end.

Finally, he was able to tell him, “Teacher, I have had great satisfaction working for you. My brothers are your apostles, but I am happy to have served you in even the smallest ways. I lament your departure with all of my heart...”

Eventually the tears rolled down his tanned cheeks. The Galilean, who was unable to contain his love for this prudent, efficient man, took him by the shoulders, saying, “David, my son, the others have done what I commanded. Yet in your case, it was your own heart that responded and served with devotion. One day you too will come to serve by my side in the eternal kingdom.”

And before the definitive separation from the Teacher, David confessed that he had ordered the Rabbi’s mother and family to travel to Jerusalem. Jesus did not seem very surprised.

He concluded, “A messenger has informed me that they arrived in Jericho tonight and they will be here early tomorrow morning.”

The Nazarene gazed at him. “So be it, David,” he replied. Then he joined the three apostles who were waiting for him at the foot of the olive grove lost in the darkness of the night. The great tragedy was about to begin....

FRIDAY APRIL 7

A strange silence fell over the campsite. I already knew tonight was not going to be like the previous ones. In spite of this, I noticed a kind of heavy turbulence in the air. It was as though thousands of ghosts—perhaps the invisible messengers Jesus had referred to—were gliding over the tops of the olive trees, shaking them as well as the dwindling tongues of fire I sat facing. A chill shook my spine.

At twelve o'clock sharp, when the camp was asleep and Jesus and his three disciples were lost between the rows of olive trees, I stood up and advised Eliseo that I was heading to the extreme northern end of the olive grove. With a rapid glance, I surveyed the oil mill, the tents, and the bodies of the sleeping Greeks in order to confirm, once again, that all was calm. I aimed my steps along the wall that surrounded the orchard on the east. I had explored it during my first visit to the property at Gethsemane.

Before David Zebedee disappeared up the mountain, he told me that, in a mutual agreement with John Mark, they were bringing him along as an extra guard. Zebedee would cover the vicinity around the peak of Mount Olivet, which included the eastern side of the campsite, and the boy would patrol the path that snaked next to the orchard's entrance gate and ran out of the property to the bridge over Cedron's gorge. This way, if the Temple police attempted to attack the Nazarene's refuge the easy way via the shortest road, i.e. the one over the Cedron or through Mount Olivet's pinnacle, Mark or Zebedee respectively, could raise the alarm. But events were going to develop in another way...

Stealthily, I tried to hide myself in the mass of trees as I advanced toward the grotto without losing contact with the stone wall. According to my instructions from the Trojan Horse Project, my observation of the speech known by Christians as "the prayer in the garden" must be performed without the protagonists being aware of or suspecting my presence. I must determine the exact location where the three apostles and the Teacher intended to pray. If Jesus, as I projected, selected a place close to the cave, my hiding place would be the wall that encircled Simon "the leper's" property.

Eliseo was right. Just as he had warned me hours earlier, the strong disturbance in the upper levels of the atmosphere east of Palestine started to be noticeable over Jerusalem. The wind grew more insistent and stifling as it shook the trees, howled through the olive trees' tortured roots and branches, like a lugubrious omen. The increasingly loud clacking of the cassia tree which grew beside the cavern helped me to orient myself.

Once I reached the bottom of the orchard, I immediately discovered the Galilean's figure standing with his head almost nailed to his chest. In fact, I found him four or five meters from the entrance to the grotto in the middle of a narrow clearing between the olive trees and a boulder. The Teacher's feet were stretched out on crusts of limestone whitened by the light of the full moon.

Without wasting a minute, I jumped to the other side of the wall and crawled through the weeds that surrounded the cavern while I kept my back to the stout cassia tree. From here I was perfectly hidden, yet I could follow all of Jesus of Nazareth's words and movements step by step. The moon shed a clear light that allowed me to see the Teacher's figure comfortably.

However, I did need to adjust my eyes to the darkness which dominated the cluster of olive trees in order to finally discern the silhouettes of Peter, John, and James. The disciples were sitting on the ground. They had laid out their mantles between the sparse trees a little more than thirty paces from the place where the Nazarene stood. Despite my efforts, from that distance I could not confirm if they were asleep or not. Fifteen to thirty minutes later, I deduced from their positions—fully spread out on the ground—and Peter’s unmistakable snoring, that at least two of them had fallen into a deep sleep. Still, a third one appeared to be leaning against the trunk of one of the olive trees and I could not judge if he was asleep or not.

Suddenly, as I was busy preparing “Moses’ staff” a rustling in the branches alerted me. I turned around. My eyes set on a white bulk about ten or fifteen meters away which was slipping between the thickets. I fell into a defensive posture with my knees on the ground. I was prepared to repel an attack from what I first identified as a strange animal. But when the “thing” was almost within the range of my staff, it stopped.

It was the young John Mark! I breathed deeply and made a sign to indicate that he should continue crouching. The boy came close to me and explained into my ear that he had abandoned his watch because he wanted to be near the Teacher. Given the circumstances, I dared not suggest that he return to the road. I asked him if he could stay with me and maintain the most absolute silence. As soon as he saw Jesus’ attitude of prayer, Mark understood and made a gesture of acceptance.

Although the giant Galilean absorbed my attention, from that instant I did not lose sight of the impetuous adolescent. It was then that Eliseo unexpectedly opened the auditory connection with great excitement and informed me of something that left me astonished. The module’s radar was receiving signals of an object “flying” over the area.

“But, that’s impossible!” I protested, putting my head between my knees so the boy could not hear me.

“Jason, I swear I have adjusted the antenna and the radar¹ screen is encoding a metallic echo. It’s moving somewhere up there at about six thousand feet. Yes, now I can see it better...I found it at 360-30 miles²...Holy god! It has stopped!”

I looked up at the sky in the direction Eliseo had mentioned and I did not observe anything abnormal. The moon’s bright luminosity made it increasingly difficult to see the stars. My partner on the *cradle* was as confused and perplexed as I. He devoted all five of his senses to the matter of this unusual “visitor.” Yet the object was now motionless and it remained so for a long time. I still had not recovered from the surprise produced by the approach of this mysterious flying object, when I saw Jesus collapse, nailing his knees to the ground.

The thud against the Earth jolted John Mark. Neither the boy nor I had ever seen the Galilean’s face look so pale and dejected. He remained there for several minutes with his chin

¹ Thanks to the splendid service of the American intelligence agency, the Trojan Horse Project had obtained the last of the 1972 plans for the “Gun Dish” radar which would be used months later by the Egyptians in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Its frequency was approximately 16 gigahertz, which is 16,000 mega cycles per second. This complex radar system had been installed onboard the module [Major’s note].

² The location of the “object” was 360° degrees (north) and 30 miles is the distance from the point where the module was parked [Major’s note].

buried in the folds of the mantle that covered his shoulders and chest. The deep inclination of his head prevented me from seeing his face clearly; however, I was almost certain he kept his eyes closed. His arms hung motionless and defeated along his body, further accentuating his unexpected fatigue. Then he slowly lifted his head until his eyes stared at the sky. The wind began to tousle his hair.

He raised his arms on both sides of his face faintly pleading, “Abba...Abba!”

I was confused. I had heard this Aramaic word on more than one occasion: children use it to refer to their fathers; it meant “daddy.” It was a familiar and well-known affectionate term, which incidentally, the Jews never used when they spoke to god. Why was Jesus using it? His eyes impressed me as well: their normal brightness had faded. Now they appeared sunken, and shadowed by a sadness, which, if I had never tested this man’s temperament, I would have sworn, was very near terror.

“Abba!” he murmured again. “I came to this world to do your will and that is what I have done... I know the time has come for me to sacrifice my mortal life...I don’t want to shun it, but I want to know if it is your will for me to drink from this cup...”

His words echoed in the orchard like a funeral drum. I could not believe what I was hearing. Was Jesus afraid?

“Give me the confidence,” he continued, “that you will be as satisfied with my death as you were with my life.”

He gradually lowered his straining, imploring, open hands. But his face, which was dimly illuminated by the moon, did not change. Without knowing exactly why, I also gazed up to the legion of stars and planets, waiting for them to produce some sign. At that instant, Eliseo opened the auditory connection as if he had been reading my thoughts.

“Jason, Jason!” he shrieked, “It’s moving again. That object is traveling. I can’t believe it! It has changed course, now it is continuing at 240...¹ Jason, come over here! Do you hear me Jason?”

“I hear you 5×5,” I replied when I could. “But are you sure it isn’t a meteor?”

Eliseo almost sent me to hell for asking such an obviously stupid question.

“Jason, this thing remained stationary² for more than twenty minutes. Now it’s moving very slowly.”

If this unexplainable object is still approximately thirty miles from our position, it is ridiculous to persist in searching the sky. Well, I tried to calm my brother in the module. I asked him to keep me punctually informed about any developments in the echo on the radar.

Meanwhile, the Teacher had stood up, turned around, and walked over to the disciples. Given the distance, I could not register his words, but I watched as he leaned over his men and

¹ The object which had previously followed a northern trajectory, began to travel in the west-southwesterly direction: precisely toward Jerusalem [Major’s note].

² In other words, it remained static or motionless [Major’s note].

touched them with his left hand. Two of the disciples who were lying down, awakened and I saw them sit up. Presently, Jesus returned to the area outside of the cavern. The three apostles observed him for a few minutes, and then they laid down again.

As he was coming closer, I noticed something strange. The giant was staggering. His steps were indecisive as though he was on the point of toppling over... he had done nothing more than come up next to the flat stone, when he fell on his face. For a moment, I thought he had fainted. Part of his body laid face down and motionless on top of the stony rubble.

John Mark stood up ready to help him. But I caught him by his arm and made him see that it was not advisable to disturb Jesus. I suppose if the Galilean had failed to start moving, the fiery Mark would not have followed my advice and would have leapt away to assist his Teacher. But Jesus was completely conscious so the youth was reassured.

As the Teacher tried to stand, it was as if an invisible force was flattening him under a one hundred kilo weight. Quite deliberately, constantly keeping his head lowered, the Galilean sat up on his heels. He paused on his knees in anguished silence for a while without raising his face. John Mark and I unconsciously exchanged glances. What was happening? What was the cause of the sudden collapse?

Jesus raised his face to the stars and moaned, calling his father again. His cheekbones and nose appeared pronounced. I was impressed by his facial expression, which was a combination of anxiety and dread. His parted lips started to tremble; almost immediately, his entire body began to shudder. These were short convulsions, very rapid and nearly imperceptible. It was as if a cold wind was lashing each one of his cells.

The Nazarene crossed his arms over his chest and applied the strength of his hands sideways in an attempt to subdue the convulsions. Instantly his forehead, neck, and temples were steeped in a cold sweat. Then the shaking grew more severe. As the convulsions progressed, Jesus doubled over at the waist and touched the wall's stone surface with his forehead.

“Abba!....Abba!”

That was the only word I was sure he pronounced. Except it was more than a call—it was a cry of anguish and terror. Now I am convinced that in those difficult crucial moments, the Galilean must have experienced the poignant and indescribable feeling of the loneliness of his affliction. And perhaps, why not, the fear of what destiny had reserved for him.

His body continued shivering from the cold. Abruptly the Teacher swiftly stepped back, raising his hands to his face. What I saw left me petrified... His whole face, forehead, neck, and palms were red. That thin initial film of sweat had turned to blood. John Mark hid his face in his hands. Gruesome drops of blood were slipping from his scalp, over the extravasation, sliding into the corners of his eyes and then rolling down his cheeks until they were lost in his mustache and beard. Some large drops paused in the corners of his mouth before forming bloody threads that cascaded over the muscles in his neck. During one of the tremors, Jesus bowed his head slightly and the moon highlighted sparkles here and there in his hair. So his hair was also inundated with blood.

I was so half hypnotized by this sudden reaction of Jesus' body, that I nearly forgot to use “Moses' staff.” I quickly set it up so I could film the scene and simultaneously start an exploration of Jesus' skin and some of his internal organs with the ultrasound imaging system.

(As I mentioned previously, this “cane” had other devices inside it in the form of miniaturized equipment capable of emitting a kind of mechanical wave or ultrasound. The “leading emission” which was installed in the top part of the staff, 1.7 meters from the base, had been programmed to capture the reflected waves, amplify them proportionally, and store the information in the nuclear computer’s titanium memory. Once the previously encrypted ultrasound data arrived at the module, it was converted into images for analyzing the teacher’s organs and physiological reactions in order to find explanations¹.)

The common exit hole and projection source for this delicate system was also camouflaged with a band of black paint. The Trojan Horse team had installed two other copper nail heads at the edge of this band. When I pressed one of them, the corresponding device, either the ultrasound or the thermal imager, was automatically activated.

The mission had supplied me with some contact lenses that we called “rattlesnakes”² for precisely positioning each one of these beams. This special type of hard “contact lens” was constructed from a very high quality material, more superior to the kind typically used in optical laboratories. Given its secret character, I cannot disclose³ its ingredients.

¹ Since we could not touch Jesus, the Trojan Horse project had installed a complex network of miniaturized equipment inside “Moses’ staff” to explore the Teacher’s body during the singular phenomena of his sweating blood at Gethsemane, the flogging, and the long hours of the crucifixion. This system, which I am going to describe in detail piece by piece—primarily consisted of a “thermal imager” and the aforementioned ultrasound. The latter was selected by experts in the Trojan Horse Project for its non-invasive nature and for its characteristics that are suitable for the scrutiny and later conversion of the images of such important internal organs as the pancreas, gall bladder, liver, the general abdominal area, including the blood circulation through the major arteries and intermediate vessels, the heart, eyes, and the soft tissues in general. Using the so-called piezoelectric effect described by the Curie brothers, according to which the compression of the surface of a quartz crystal creates a current (ultrasound) a place on the head was composed of a plate of piezoelectric crystal made of barium titanate. A high frequency generator supplied the plate with the power to produce ultrasound waves that have a frequency which varies between 16,000 and 10^{10} Hertz. These ultrasound waves propagate with a velocity of 1,000 to 1,600 meters per second inside the human body (except for the bones) and permit an excellent examination and subsequent visualization of the desired organs. It can also pick up the sound of the heartbeat and the flow of blood via a system adapted from the Doppler effect. With intensities that range between 2.5 and 2.8 milliwatts per square centimeter and a frequency of approximately 2.25 Megahertz, the ultrasound machine uses a complex network of amplifiers, sensitive controls, modulators, and bandwidth filters to transform the initial waves into audible waves. In order to solve the troublesome problem posed by the air—a vital enemy of ultrasound waves—and the fact that the scans could only be performed a certain distance from Jesus, the experts who worked on the project devised a revolutionary system capable of “confining” and guiding the ultrasound waves through a very tiny cylinder of low energy laser light. The flow of free electrons from this laser remained “frozen” at the very moment of their emission. The process of “freezing” the laser’s electrons, which I am not allowed to reveal, produces what we could qualify as “solid light” whose future applications are unimaginable. Of course the longitude of the longest waves, which measured 8,000 angstrom (0.8 micron) and the “tube” of laser light operated chiefly in the infrared region, which could only be seen with the special contact lens supplied by the Trojan Horse project. Therefore, the ultrasound waves could travel inside the “tube” formed by the “solid or coherent” light which could be launched from a distance ranging from five to twenty-five meters [Major’s note].

² This is exactly because of its relative similarity to the “infrared” snakes use to hunt their prey by sensing the infrared radiation radiated by their victims’ bodies.

³ Generally, hard contact lenses are made from a product called poly (methyl methacrylate) (PMMA), which is really the basis for these contact lenses.

I surmise it would have been more ideal to use “night vision” glasses to track the infrared laser as well as the color changes in the Nazarene’s¹ body that were a consequence of the internal temperature variations and distinct physiological changes caused by the torture. Obviously, it was not possible for the Trojan Horse team to design wholly transparent contact lenses that would adjust to one’s eyes and have been feasible for tracking without eliciting a dangerous surprise from the inhabitants of that era.

Once I was behind John Mark, I put my hand into the small case that contained the custom-made “rattlesnakes” for my eyes. Although the “contact lenses” had been perfected with monovalent ions² that facilitated the circulation of tears in the eyes and an excellent oxygenation of the cornea, General Curtiss had warned me strongly not to abuse them and to limit my usage to a maximum of thirty to forty minutes³. I briskly pushed the nail to activate the emission of the ultrasound waves⁴.

The spectacle presented to my eyes—or I should really say “to my brain”—was almost Dantesque: Jesus’ face, neck, and hands appeared to be a greenish blue color because of the drop in his body temperature in the said areas. This was most likely a result of the cooling effect of the sweat and blood that issued from his pores. His white tunic emitted a much more intense signal, while his cloak appeared in a darker shade that was nearly black. The olive grove’s foliage was exposed as in indescribable red.

When I pressed the head of the nail into its second position—the deepest one—a fine beam of red light from the infrared laser light came out of the top of “Moses’ staff.” Without wasting a second, I directed it to the Nazarene’s face, neck, hair, and hands. I suppose neither John Mark nor anyone else who could have witnessed the scene would have seen or heard anything. Since the laser was operating in the infrared frequency, its light was invisible to the human eye.

¹ It is well known that any object with a temperature greater than absolute zero (i.e. minus 273 degrees centigrade) emits infrared or IR energy. This emission of infrared rays, which is invisible to the human eye — is caused by atomic vibrations inside the molecules and is therefore closely linked to the temperature of each body. Well now, it has been proven that the human eye can only see a small portion of the electromagnetic spectrum for light, namely that which extends from 400 to 700 nanometers. But infrared light appears outside of this range. However, through the use of special “glasses” calibrated for the infrared emission, a human can also “see” this frequency. (The infrared region is subdivided into the near, medium, far, and extreme infrared.) The infrared or IR sensors of the American rattlesnake are formed by a membrane endowed with abundant nerve endings which enable it to detect temperature variations on the order of a thousandth degree [Major’s note].

² The project’s specialists had successfully produced these almost miraculous “infrared” contact lenses by incorporating a series of peripheral bands on the surface of the main curve. These were hundreds of “micro-cells” that were nothing but filters (Wratten 89B) which only allowed infrared radiation to pass through. Their specific weight was 1.19. Their tensile strength was 10,000 to 15,000 with a Rockwell hardness of M85-M105.

³ Nonetheless, there was a remote possibility that I would stumble upon a strong high intensity natural energy source (if I had looked at the sun) which would have caused serious lesions on my eyes. Although nothing like this happened, I was advised not subject the direct contact between the “rattlesnakes” and my cornea to overuse.

⁴ In respect to the ultrasound feature, the head of the white colored copper nail could adopt two perfectly distinct positions: the first one initiated the launch of waves with a frequency of 3.5 megahertz (which was sufficient to explore internal organs), the second position released waves with a frequency from 7.5 to 10 megahertz (suitable for tracking the surface and soft tissues) [Major’s note].

After a detailed tour of the bloody areas, I changed the ultrasound frequency (by returning the nail to its first position) and focused the beam of light on the upper part of the Rabbi's abdomen. This is how I examined his pancreas and perhaps, how I obtained a satisfactory explanation for the origin of the sweat in the form of blood. (Once we had returned from the first "grand journey" and the members of the Trojan Horse team analyzed the images generated by this method, the experts in biochemistry and hematology reached a variety of interesting conclusions.

The bloody sweat or "hematidrosis" had been caused by acute stress. Just as I had been able to appreciate, the Nazarene had succumbed to a steep decline which was partly motivated by an explosive mix of anxiety, loneliness, sadness, and perhaps fear of the extremely harsh tests which awaited him. According to the specialists, this violent emotional tension released certain chemicals from the pancreas¹ which forced the capillaries to rupture, thereby flooding the sweat glands. Once the subcutaneous pores were broken, the blood flowed to the skin's surface mixed with sweat. The phenomenon is as spectacular as it is rare. However, it is perfectly possible from the medical point of view. In this case, Luke, the evangelist was correct. (In one of his works, Pierre Benoit gives an account of a soldier who was on the point of being lead before a German firing squad in 1914 and sweated blood as a consequence of the unbearable dread produced by this distressing situation.)

Yet this bloody expulsion or extravascular extrusion was not a hemorrhage. In the Son of Man. It did not represent a significant loss of blood. However, the reports from the Trojan Horse project concluded that Jesus' skin was left in an alarmingly fragile state. This circumstance definitely have a decisive role in the "carnage" that would occur in a few hours even more than in the torture. Of course, I am referring to the punishment by flogging. This initial extensive breach of the capillary network or the finest blood vessels for circulating blood beneath the skin turned the flagellation into a tragic blood bath...

During the first moments of considerable stress that he suffered in the olive grove, one of my primary concerns was the effect on Jesus' heartbeat and arterial tension or blood pressure. As I directed the ultrasound over his heart, the "Doppler effect" showed a rate 135 beats per minute. His blood pressure had risen to a maximum of 210. (The Nazarene's normal heartbeat was estimated to be 60 beats per minute and his blood pressure varied between a maximum of 130 and a minimum of 80. Evidently, this indicated a profound organic disorder. The specialist on the Trojan Horse team also conjectured that an earlier discharge of adrenaline into the man's bloodstream—in view of the peripheral arterial resistance—could have been on the order of ten micrograms per kilogram and minute.)

Eventually, after ten or fifteen minutes, I confirmed that the Rabbi's spirit was calm. His heart rate and blood pressure had returned to their normal levels. However, in the nutritionist opinion, this difficult trial completely exhausted the 750 calories that the recent dinner provided. I maintain that the stress must have consumed a substantially higher amount of calories than this quantity. The medics on the Trojan Horse team inferred that this was when the Nazarene began to draw on his natural reserves, starting from one or two o'clock in the morning on Friday.

¹ It was initially thought that the "hematidrosis" had been provoked by an excess of histamine released by the nervous system as a consequence of the severe emotional stress and this had launched such a sanguineous torrent that the capillaries broke. However, subsequent investigations of the pancreas inclined the experts toward the hypothesis called fibrinolysis, which is a pathological activation of a normal mechanism. An abrupt increase in plasmin (plasminogen) could cause a widespread outpouring of blood by diluting the "endothelial cement" which would result in the passage of blood to the exterior [Major's note].

(With this energy intake, assuming that Jesus could have immediately retired to rest and then his body would have held out until approximately eight o'clock in the morning. However, when the crisis started in the olive grove at Gethsemane, the specialist believed that the Son of Man's body had initiated lipolysis by burning fat in his adipose tissue in order to supply fatty acids to his body for fuel and survived. Reserves of glycogen or concentrated sugar run out in a matter of hours and of course the Galilean did not have other alternatives to "lend a hand" besides his fat.)

From a medical perspective, the Teacher's situation began to be delicate. Fifteen or thirty minutes after I had commenced this first "checkup" using the ultrasound, I switched off the laser and removed my "rattlesnakes." John Mark still had his face hidden in his hands and refused to look at the Teacher. I put my arm over his shoulders and stroked his head. He gradually revealed his face. He was crying.

In the clearing, the Galilean had lowered his hands. The convulsions had ceased as had the flow of blood. Some of the largest spurts had coagulated along with the smallest rivulets. If the Teacher did not take care to wash his face very soon, the dried blood would turn his handsome face into a mask... Jesus raised his eyes to the firmament again and in a more serene voice repeated his earlier prayer almost verbatim.

"Father...I know very well it is possible to avoid this cup. Everything is possible with you. But, I came to do your will and however bitter it is, I will drink it if you wish..."

In this second prayer (I do not know if I should qualify it that way), I first noted a marked change in the teacher's emotional state as well as his attitude in respect to the impending events. While his first words floated in doubt, on this occasion, the Galilean seemed to have overcome part of his anxiety and demonstrated a definite decision to accept his fate. It was conceivable that this mental change was responsible for a good measure of his progressive tranquility. But of course, this appraisal seems very subjective.

In fact, I was so engaged in my preliminary medical examinations and hanging on Jesus' words that I had almost forgotten about Eliseo and the nearby enigmatic object. But my companion was not tardy in reminding me about it.

"Attention Jason! This "thing" has ceased being stationary. It's moving again. For all of the—"

My partner's transmission was interrupted for a few seconds. Finally Eliseo, who was very agitated, continued, "It fell like a bucket! Jason, that thingamajig descended to Level 30 in one second¹! It can't be! If this continues, I will lose it...No! I still have it, for the moment...But it's coming toward us..."

I literally stuck my lips to the trunk of the cassia tree and inquired, "I understand thirty..."

¹ Level 30 is three thousand feet, which is approximately a thousand meters [Major's note].

“Affirmative,” Eliseo responded, “It is thirty and it continues approaching at radius 100¹...The radar estimates its position is ten miles. If it doesn’t change its course, we will be able to see it soon.

Regardless of how much I looked, I did not see it. It was then, as I had my gaze on the stars, that I became aware of another strange phenomenon: the branches of the voluminous tree I was hiding behind were suddenly motionless. The wind had stopped. I did not detect any movement in the canopy of olive trees nor in the undergrowth around the tree trunks. Jesus’ hair was also in a state of repose. I was a little alarmed so I questioned Eliseo about the wind’s speed and direction.

“At 40,000 feet, 120 degrees 50²,” my brother answered. “But wait... Level 10 has disappeared! I don’t understand.”

Suddenly on my left (due east), I discerned a point of light moving over the summit of Mount Olivet. It was coming straight toward our position with a trajectory, which at first, seemed to me to be completely horizontal with respect to the ground. Astonished and half-stammering I pressed my left ear.

“Eliseo...I’m looking at it! It’s at nine o’clock from my position³! It’s taking an eastern course. But for all the devils, why is that?”

The response from the module would serve to confirm that I was not the victim of a hallucination.

“Affirmative,” exclaimed Eliseo who was more bewildered than me. “The screen continues to detect it at Level 10. Now it is about to fly over the “cradle”! I have to collimate it⁴...What is its velocity? It’s incredible: it has not reached sixty miles per hour. But what’s happening?”

The communication was interrupted again. These were interminable seconds. Meanwhile, the “light” was almost vertically above us. It stopped!

“Jason!” my partner finally appeared, “Jason, do you hear me?”

“Affirmative,” I hurried to respond. “And we have it above our heads.”

“Jason, something is happening to the radar: that thing is blocking me⁵! Did you register a drop in the level?”

¹ Radial 100 of an object is its approximate course one hundred degrees in the east-southeasterly direction [Major’s note].

² At this altitude, the wind’s direction is 120 degrees (southeast) with a speed of about fifty knots (around 100 kilometers per hour) [Major’s note].

³ In the argot of aeronautics, nine o’clock is located to the left of the observer with the twelve o’clock point on an analog clock always taken as the point in front of the observer. For example, “three” would be to the right [Major’s note].

⁴ “Collimate” means Eliseo has located the object and centered it on his instrumentation panel [Major’s note].

⁵ The module’s radar was being “silenced” or incapacitated by another possible radar emission or electronic interference from the object [Major’s note].

“Negative,” I answer without losing sight of the light. “It seems to persist in its stationary position.”

I had scarcely finished transmitting these words to Eliseo when the light went into free fall for a tenth of a second and then hovered at maybe fifty or one hundred meters above the clearing. It was so vertiginous that I did not have the time to do anything. I was paralyzed as was John Mark and I suppose anyone else who found themselves around us. I was absolutely conscious. I could see and hear, but I definitely could not move my muscles. My locomotion apparatus would not obey the impulses from my brain nor from my will. It was useless to try to force it.

A powerful autonomous white light, brighter than the light from soldering, surrounded the circular “light” and immobilized us. During those difficult seconds, if I could have heard my partner’s extremely worried voice from the module, he would not have been able to do anything other than call me... Since, in spite of my efforts, I could not articulate a single word.

Nearly at the same time that this luminous mass—that was more than fifty meters in diameter—hovered above the site, a type of light “cylinder” came out of the center of the “disk.” It illuminated Jesus, the stone slabs, and the ground within a radius of approximately five to six meters. Although the Teacher’s face was raised, he did not seem to be alarmed. He stayed on his knees... My level of confusion had no limit. How was it possible for the Nazarene not to feel as dazed and frightened as I was?

The fear that invaded me was fully shared by my young companion—judging from the position he had assumed. At the light’s fulminating descent, he had put his arms over his head in a reflexive protective motion. And there he remained cowering, with his face pointed toward the silent luminous object... I am not sure if I understood what happened after that, but close to the same instant that the “cylinder” of white light touched the clearing, a human figure—at least that is how it looked to me—rose over the flat stone right next to the Rabbi.

The figure had its back to me and I suppose, despite the blinding light which flooded the area, its physical structure was solid and consistent. This was verified when the being reached the Teacher’s height: he blocked Jesus’ body from my view. The mere feeling that it continued to control me exacerbated my terror even more. All of my attention was concentrated on the figure that was there. It was very tall, much taller than Jesus. It probably reached a height of two meters or so.

It was not dressed like us. Instead, its attire reminded me of what fighter pilots wear in the USAF, but with a tighter fit and a more intense magnetic shine. (However, this effect may well have been attributed to the prevailing sharp clarity.) The “coveralls” appeared to be in one-piece with a relatively wide belt that was the same hue as the rest of the aluminum colored suit. My attention was called to the pants, which were tucked into calf length golden boots.

As for the head, I could only see the occipital area and the nape of the neck. It had straight, white, abundant hair that fell over its shoulders. It was undoubtedly a muscular individual with broad shoulders. Although the reigning silence was complete, I could not hear a word. I was ignorant of their conversation. All I could perceive was the being’s moving its right arm towards Jesus who presumably remained on his knees.

If it had not been for Eliseo, I would not have been able to count the time that passed. According to my colleague, the “lapse” in my auditory connection with the module was a in

“white out” that lasted for four or five minutes. At the end of this “time” the figure and the luminous “cylinder” disappeared instantaneously. And I said it correctly: instantaneously!

I did not—or at least I could not perceive the being’s elevation to the height of the luminous disk—even as I watched it move away and disappear from the olive grove... I simply have no explanation. Then light immediately performed a smooth, balanced liftoff and rose vertically with an acceleration that made me dizzy. In the wink of an eye, (assuming I could have winked) the object turned into an insignificant point and faded into infinity. Almost immediately, John Mark and I recovered our mobility. The wind resumed blowing strongly between the tree branches, while the goats tethered in the grotto bleated plaintively.

“Jason! Do you receive me Jason? Jason, for god’s sake, answer me!”

Eliseo’s voice continued echoing in my ear. I inhaled with all of my strength as I tried to calm my nerves.

“A-fir-ma-tive,” I replied with what little voice I had left.

“Roger! At last...! Jason are you okay? What happened?”

I reassured my partner and indicated that I would try to explain it much later. To tell the truth my confusion had only increased. For a second I thought it had all been a nightmare. But no. When I directed my gaze at the Teacher my perplexity grew: the bloody film and tracks that had covered his face, neck, and hands were gone. His complexion was still pale and haggard, yet there were no traces of the recent hematidrosis. It was impossible that Jesus had taken the time to go to some of the campsite’s water containers and wash his face, neck, and hands. Besides, if I accepted this assumption, I would have seen him leave and I suppose, come back to the rock. On the contrary, I was sure, absolutely sure the Teacher had not abandoned his kneeling position in the clearing for a single moment.

Still in a state of incomprehensibility, John Mark was continued crouching behind the stone wall as if nothing had transpired. Much later, when I questioned him about what happened that night in the olive grove, the boy responded affirmatively.

“Yes,” he said without giving it too much importance, as though he had witnessed other similar events, “the father sent down an angel...of course I saw it.”

The Galilean who was now more placid raised his eyes to the heavens again and smiled. Then he stood up and walked with firm steps to the edge of the olive grove. I do not know how, but the sudden appearance of that “angel”, “astronaut”, “ghost” or whatever it was, had decisively influenced the Son of Man’s spirit. The evangelists’ expression “and the angels comforted him”, could not have been more appropriate.

The Nazarene must have found his disciples sleeping again. He gestured with them, retraced his steps and for the third time, kneeled at the edge of the stone. It was amazing. None of the disciples seemed to have realized what happened. They probably were asleep. Once he was there again, the Teacher spoke in his usual tone of voice, always keeping his gaze fixed upwards.

“Father, you see my disciples sleeping. Extend your mercy to them. In truth the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus fell silent, closed his eyes, and bowed his head. After a few seconds, he raised his face to the sky again. “And now my father, if you cannot take away this cup...I will drink it. I will do your will and not mine.”

It must have been one o’clock in the morning on Friday April 7, when after some minutes in total solitude, the giant stood up and went to his three closest friends for the last time, but for the umpteenth time, they had fallen into a deep sleep. However, on this occasion, the Galilean did not return to the clearing. He woke up his men and soon all four of them went deeper inside the olive grove until I lost sight of them.

I have ruminated a great deal on Jesus’ strange words. What could he have meant when he said “take away this cup”? Did he mean the possibility of avoiding the torture and his own death? I had believed this for some time. Yet once I was a witness to the horrific Passion and his incredible comportment, a more subtle interpretation has replaced my earlier hypothesis. Now I am beginning to sense the Teacher’s great “tragedy”. In the critical moments of the so-called “Agony in the Garden,” fear was probably not the cause for his intense anguish and the subsequent bloody sweat.

He knew what destiny had reserved for him as he demonstrated very well when he confronted the pain openly and valiantly. The Galilean also knew the torture would involve humiliations. It must have been the “contemplation” of this impending maltreatment by the beings that he himself had created, which perhaps plunged him into an acute state of prostration. If he really was the Son of God, this simple observation of the cruelty and primitivism of “his men” for him would have been unbearable—even more than the suffering. To overcome the distance, imagine what brutal moral suffering it would be for a father to see his children slapped, insulted, hurt, and injured...

John Mark and I jumped quickly over the wall that separated us from the clearing where the three prayers in the garden had taken place. With equal caution, we penetrated the olive grove in the footsteps of Jesus and his men. As I caught up with them and we drew near open area around the campsite, a thought—as absurd as it was inopportune—kept hammering my brain. I could not erase the images in my mind of a being more than two meters tall and the flying object, especially since “that” had to have been a flight vehicle capable of elegantly defying the laws of gravity. What kind of device was that? What technology could perform sideways¹ accelerations and decelerations?

Above all, what was the relationship between Jesus and that Divinity? I would have given ten years of my life to have recorded the conversation between the Teacher and that mysterious being. And curse my bad star which had not allowed me to see both characters faces and at least construe what had happened between them. Ever since then a sharp uncertainty lodged in my heart, could that have been an angel? If it really was, how far the theologians are from the truth!

When, at last, the campsite came into view everything was more or less the same. The Teacher’s disciples were deep asleep and far removed from what occurred a few meters from

¹ As a member of the Air Force, I know the extent of a human being’s resistance to the force of gravity. With the aid of special suits, some astronauts have endured up to 11 “g” (where “g” is the normal value for the “acceleration due to gravity”, in other words a “g” is 9.80665 meters per second each second). According to my estimate, that object executed “fall” and a subsequent “liftoff” which must have subjected its “pilots” to twenty or thirty “g” [Major’s note].

their tents. I say everything carried on more or less the same because our return coincided with the entrance of David Zebedee's secret agents into the olive grove.

Panting, excitedly they asked for their "boss". It was John Mark who indicated the place where they had set up the guard. In the interim, the Teacher advised Peter, John, and James to go to sleep. But now the apostles were sufficiently rested and alert, presumably from the short, but deep sleep they had enjoyed near the cave. So they grew increasingly nervous about the messenger's unexpected arrival and resisted.

Without repressing the temptation, fiery Peter interrogated one of Zebedee's agents. The man, cornered by Simon's questions, finally stated that a party of the Sanhedrin's hired assassins and a Roman escort were heading this way. Peter drew back with a distraught expression on his face. Yet, when he went toward the tents with the intention of awaking his companions, Jesus stood in his way and ordered him to remain silent. The Galilean's admonition was so emphatic that the disciples were bewildered and stayed in place as if they were nailed to the ground.

The Greeks, who were camped out in the open air, were also awakened by Zebedee agent's precipitous emergence. Soon they surrounded Jesus and the three apostles and questioned them. But the Teacher had recovered his customary tranquility. He asked them to calm down and return to the oil mill. It was useless. None of those present moved from where they were. The Nazarene instantly understood his men's attitudes and without a word, walked away from the group, leaving the campsite with giant strides.

For several seconds, the Greeks and the apostles were doubtful. Once again, the young John Mark took the initiative. In an instant, he escaped from the olive grove and was lost on the hill below. Jesus' unexpected reaction of leaving the property at Gethsemane baffled me. According to the canonical gospels, which are the primary source of information, the arrest should have been carried out at the far end of the olive grove. Yet the Nazarene had just left it...

Without a second thought about the Greeks and the three apostles who stood motionless in the center of the campground, I followed the boy. Jesus as well as John Mark had taken the familiar path that passed along the western side of Mount Olivet. I had used it on several occasions to go to the tiny bridge over the gully formed by the Cedron's dried up stream.

At that moment, I noticed the movement of a large group of torches on the other side of the bridge. Once I had thoroughly scrutinized them, I confirmed that they were heading toward the east side of the mountain. These were the armed men Zebedee's messengers had mentioned. Perturbed, I went down the trail until, at a bend in the road, I saw John Mark take refuge in a small wooden shack at the foot of the same trail. I must say he was solely recognizable by the white canvas sheet. I stopped without knowing what to do.

But that was just the beginning of the surprises at dawn that Friday. I could see a cask that was similar in construction to the one at the entrance to Gethsemane, which was a part of one of the oil presses that are so plentiful on this mountain of olives. The Teacher was sitting on the low stone wall around the press, a few feet from the trail, facing the direction that was bringing the yellow swarm of oscillating lights even closer.

At first, I thought of hiding inside the shack too, but I discarded the idea. I was absolutely ignorant about the course events could take and I preferred to remain in an open space. Olive plantations extended down both sides of the road. These could make a good observatory. I swiftly left the trail and entered a dark olive grove on the left side of the road. I selected one of the

thickest trees and climbed to the top of it, camouflaging myself in its branches. Jesus was a little more than five or six meters away.

Suddenly I was assaulted by a question that nearly made me climb down the olive tree. What if the Galilean returned to the camp? In that case, I would have no other alternative than to follow behind the troops. If I was not mistaken, the out of the way route Jesus had taken to the entrance to Simon “the leper’s” olive grove had a bend in the road at about 100 or 150 paces. On seeing him there, so extraordinarily serene I began to understand.

I did not have to be very awake to guess that his act of rapidly distancing himself from the area where his men were staying could only be motivated by his wish that his encounter with Judas and the Sanhedrin’s police would not affect his disciples. He knew many of the disciples and the Greeks were carrying weapons, and he probably wanted to avoid the more than certain risk of an armed clash. If my memory does not fail me, at that time there were about sixty men at the campsite. If anyone of them, such as Peter or Simon the Zealot, had taken out his sword, it would have been sufficient to provoke a bloody battle.

If the version Zebedee’s secret agent had given was correct, the Levites from the Temple were accompanied by a Roman patrol. And this undoubtedly complicated things. The mercenaries from Antonia’s fortress were not exactly distinguished by their sweet manners. I had witnessed their ferocity when they beat one of their own colleagues. What could be expected from the battle-hardened infantry in the event of a confrontation? Chances are many of the Teacher’s disciples would be injured or killed, and in the best case, taken prisoners. And Jesus, based on his prayers in the olive grove, wanted to avoid this at all costs. What would happen to his mission and the future spread of the gospel of the Kingdom if those responsible for preaching fell that night in Gethsemane?

The torches appeared and disappeared in the thickets as they came closer. I asked Eliseo for information about the exact time. It was a quarter past one o’clock in the morning. The moon continued shining brilliantly in all of its splendor thus providing me with more than acceptable visibility. Presently, I saw what appeared to be a single individual a certain distance from the cluster of torches and the oil mill where the Teacher waited. He traveled up the road to the campsite. On seeing him, Jesus stood and went to the center of the road.

The fast walker, whom I could not identify at first, then noticed the Galilean’s tall figure with his white tunic bathed in the moonlight. The Teacher’s unexpected presence cut off his path. He must have been confused since he paused a moment. After a few seconds of indecision, he continued to advance, however this time without being in so much of a hurry. The mysterious character wrapped in a dark cloak must have been thirty or forty meters from the Rabbi when the platoon carrying torches burst onto the scene at the bottom of the path.

They were in a state of chaos, yet they managed to form a long line. At first sight, the number of individuals rallied to half a hundred. In agreement with what I could see beyond the men in front, there were about thirty Roman soldiers. These were dressed in the same uniform I had seen the infantry wear in Antonia’s Tower and armed with swords, some lances, and shields. Directly behind them almost mixed in with the first –were forty to fifty troops from the Temple’s police force that carried their best batons and maces embedded with nails.

My puzzlement reached its maximum when some other torches surged among the olive trees to my right. There were not many of these, perhaps there were ten. But they were zigzagging at high speed down to the point where Jesus could be found. From the direction they came, I

assumed they were the disciple and a chill traveled through my body. If both sides came face to face, who knows what would happen.

The group to my left, which came from Jerusalem—continued to silently advance until it halted a stone's throw from the Galilean. For their part, the ones who appeared on the right finished by congregating on the footpath. Once they had regrouped, they continued descending very slowly. When the troops that arrived to arrest the Nazarene paused, Jesus followers stopped too. The latter were closer to the Teacher, perhaps twenty or twenty-five paces from him. In the torchlight, I could see that Peter was in the first row. John, James, and the twenty Greeks were also there with him. However, no matter how hard I looked, I did not see Simon the Zealot nor the rest of the disciples and apostles. This meant they had not awakened.

For a few minutes, which felt endless to me, only the wind whistled in the olive trees, shaking the flames both groups' torches. Jesus stood in the middle of the road waiting for the man who had detached from the mob which had come from the Holy City. When he was scarcely a few meters from this person who approached the Rabbi at eye level, the moon highlighted his pale face: it was Judas! But why had he come out ahead of the troops? This riddle would be solved the next morning shortly before the fatal, unforeseen event, which brought about Iscariot's death. (Once again, Judas had engineered his plans with as much cunning as malice.)

Finally, Jesus reacted. With great aplomb, he started towards Judas, but once he was at eye level, he veered away to the left side of the road, shunning the traitor. Iscariot was perplexed. He turned around a moment. The Teacher continued in the direction of the soldiers, then stopped a few meters from the group. From there he addressed who appeared to be the leader in a loud voice.

“What are you searching for here?”

The Roman soldier, who judging from his red plumed helmet and the sword located on his left side, must have been an officer, stepped forward at the same time and responded in Greek, “Jesus of Nazareth!”

The Teacher walked towards the possible centurion with great solemnity. “I am he,” Jesus declared.

When the five or six Roman mercenaries who occupied the first row heard these serene majestic words from the giant, they abruptly fell backwards. This sudden movement caused them to stumble over their companions who were immediately behind them, resulting in a series of grotesque falls. Several of those who held torches hit their bones on the ground. The indignant official returned to the head of the group and began beating the clumsy, hesitant soldiers with the baton he carried in his right hand.

(This scene reminded me of the gospel account of John, the only one who mentions this generalized fall of the troops who had arrived to arrest the Teacher. But far from having the character of a miracle, that the theologians and exegetes had wanted to see in the event, the only truth is that these men tumbled to the ground as a consequence of a miscalculated movement. Why they retreated is another matter. In my opinion, they probably were scared. Nearly all of them had seen Jesus when he preached in the Temple esplanade and it was likewise very possible they knew about his miracles and his power. If we combine these with the courage with which the Galilean stood before them, perhaps this is what we have for an answer...)

While the Roman infantry stood up and recovered their battered dignity, Judas—whose plans were not turning out as he had anticipated, as I would discover many hours later—approached the Nazarene and embraced him. It was quick and ostentatious in a way that everyone could see. He rose up on the toes of his sandals and stamped a kiss on Jesus' forehead.

At the same time he said, "Greetings Teacher and Rabbi!"

Without losing his composure, the Galilean replied, "Friend...! It is not enough that you do this. Do you also wish to betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Before Judas could react, the Teacher freed himself from the traitor's embrace and confronted the Roman official and the rest of the troops again.

"Who are you searching for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth!" the officer repeated.

"I already told you I am he..." Jesus added, "If the one you seek is me, let the rest continue on their way. I am willing to follow you."

The officer found the Nazarene's request reasonable. He stood next to Jesus and as they were preparing to return to Jerusalem, one of the Sanhedrin's guards left the platoon and pounced on Jesus. He carried a rope in his hands. Despite the fact that the leader of the Roman patrol had not given any such order, this Syrian who responded to the name Malchus rushed to restrain the Rabbi's arms and attempted to tie them behind his back.

When the officer saw this, he raised his baton, ready no doubt, to scare off this intruder. But the fulminating entrance of Peter and his companions, ruined the intentions of those responsible for the arrest. Indeed, with dizzying speed Peter and the rest, outraged by Malchus' actions—rushed upon him. Simon, James, and some of the Greeks had drawn their swords and, as they hurled all sorts of curses, they started to attack. Before the Roman escort had time to protect Malchus, Peter fell on the terrified high priest's servant with his sword held high and launched a violent two-handed blow above his skull.

At the last second, Malchus managed to throw himself to one side thus avoiding Simon's powerful left, which would have opened his head. Instead, the edge of the sword grazed the right side of his face, slicing off his ear and wounding his shoulder. Jesus raised his arms toward Peter and rebuked his act with great severity.

"Peter, sheathe your sword! Whoever draws his sword will die by the sword. Don't you understand it is my father's will that I drink from this cup? Don't you know that at this very moment he could send dozens of legions of angels and their companions to free me from the hands of men?"

The disciples were stunned, especially Peter. They did not understand the Teacher's words, much less his docility toward his enemies. Malchus was still writhing and howling in pain when Jesus leaned over him. With paramount firmness, he removed the Syrian man's hand from his bloody ear and placed the palm of his right hand over the wound. In a matter of seconds, Malchus' groans had diminished in volume and frequency. Then the Rabbi repeated the operation, placing his hand on the man's shoulder. From the top of the tree, I could not verify the type of healing the Galilean performed. However, I am certain he stopped the copious

hemorrhaging and practically “froze” the wretched man’s pain. (Over the course of the next two days of intense work, prior to my final return to the module, I tried every means to locate this Syrian and inspect the deep gash that Peter had inflicted. Nevertheless, my efforts were fruitless.)

The bellicose attitude of Peter and his companions only made things worse. The Roman officer, who ignored Jesus’ peaceful words and humanitarian gesture toward Malchus, ordered his troops to hold the Nazarene while they tied his wrists behind his back. As they tied the Teacher’s hands, he was deeply saddened by this humiliation so he addressed the Levites and the soldiers who contemplated the scene, as they stood with their swords and batons ready to repeal any further attack.

“Why do you take your sticks and swords out against me as if I were a thief? You have been with me in the Temple every day when I taught and preached publically in the town, but you did nothing to stop me...”

No one answered. Once the thick rope immobilized him, the officer spoke to his men and commanded them to arrest this, in his words, “group of fanatics” too. But, the patrol did not react in time. Peter and his companions threw their torches at the Romans and fled the scene. This new lapse on the part of the escort was more than sufficient for the Teacher’s twenty or so followers to scatter up the slope into the olive groves. Almost all of the legionnaires left in pursuit of them.

Nonetheless, the disciples knew the terrain best and were in a panic which was large enough for them to fly much less run—they did not tarry in disappearing. The proof was that in five or ten minutes, the troops returned to the road and commenced their return to Jerusalem. The Teacher who was heavily escorted, soon disappeared with the troops around one of the curves in the road.

It was ten minutes until two o’clock in the morning. The shouting had dissipated. And I was left there with my shrunken heart plunged into the deathly silence. Yet I must continue my mission. So trying not to make too much noise, I descended from the top of the olive tree. I admit my ideas were not very clear. For several minutes, I stood in doubt at the foot of the tree. What road should I take? I considered returning to the campsite and rejoining the group of Greeks and disciples who remained, but that did not seem like the best course. Besides, who knew where they were going to stop? It was more logical to follow in the footprints of the platoon of soldiers and the Temple police. But how could I follow them without raising their suspicions or what was worse, without being arrested?

When I was ready to leave the olive grove and set out on the road to the Holy City, the silhouettes of two mercenaries who had lagged behind the others suddenly appeared from behind the olive trees on the other side of the path. I clung to the tree trunks and waited for them to pass. If they discovered my presence, I would have seen myself in a delicate situation. But, the very moment the soldiers entered the trail, John Mark appeared stealthily at the door to the shack where he had hidden during the arrest. It was his perdition.

The Romans saw his scandalous white sheet at once and dashed towards the boy. This time the soldiers’ reaction was so fast Mark had no time to escape. One of the men grabbed the sheet while the second ran behind his companion’s back. Yet the agile Mark did not give up. Without thinking twice, he easily cast away the sheet and fled naked into the mass of olive trees where the unlucky foreigners burst in after him. The youth’s crafty trick had caught the Romans unawares. By the time they chased after him they had already lost a few precious seconds. The

first one managed to seize him and throw the sheet to the ground. He cursed, unsheathed his sword and started a careening chase. His partner did the same.

However, bad luck seemed to prey on the Roman troops that night. The second soldier tripped over a root and fell face down. As a result of the impact, his helmet came off and rolled down the slope. The infuriated soldier was so blinded by his eagerness to capture John Mark in the ambush that he forgot his helmet. I knew it would be risky but I allowed my intuition to lead me to abandon my hiding place and approach the place where he had dropped his helmet. I picked it up and tried to compose myself as I waited for him. It was actually a leather helmet without any distinctive emblem or adornment.

I did not have to wait long. Within minutes, they returned to the edge of the olive grove. But they were so absorbed in the search for the helmet, that they did not notice me. So, I raised my voice and the helmet as I addressed them in Greek. On seeing me, the soldiers did not react. They slowly drew closer to me. A cold sweat began to soak my tunic. If this strategy did not work, my security could be seriously threatened.

The one who lost the helmet reached me, stopped a couple of meters away, and inspected me from head to foot. He was sweating and out of breath. The second man was at his side without delay. I tried to smile, but I honestly do not know if I succeeded. The fact is I did manage to conceal the acute shaking of my hands as I extended the helmet. The Roman swiftly and violently snatched it away and immediately put it on his head.

“Who are you?” the second soldier said at last.

“My name is Jason,” I answered with my heart in a fist. “I am Greek and I am going to Jerusalem...” All at once, I remembered the authorization the Roman prefect had granted me in order to facilitate my entry into Antonia’s Fortress. Without hesitation, I stuck my hand in to my oilskin pouch and showed them the letter for safe conduct while I explained that I was due to visit Pontius Pilate on Friday morning.

The soldiers’ gazes were diverted to the scroll; even so, I doubted they knew how to read. Nevertheless, they did identify Pontius’ signature because their attitudes became more congenial and acquiescent.

“Which way are you coming from?”

“Bethany.”

“Then, don’t you know what happened here?” inquired the one who spoke Greek.

“Here?” I asked, adopting a tone of total ignorance. “No. What happened?”

“It’s all the same to me,” the mercenary concluded. “We are also going to Jerusalem. If you would like us to escort you...”

I was delighted with such a suggestion, except as soon as it seemed everything was settled, the soldier who had lost his helmet took his partner’s lance and without further ado, pointed it at my chest. I was paralyzed. As looked at the infantryman again, his face became familiar. The soldier finally smiled.

Of, course! I promptly remembered this was the Roman soldier from Antonia's Tower who had aimed his *pilum* at me while Joseph of Arimathea and I were waiting for his partner to come back...

I returned his smile. Once he was satisfied that I had recognized him, he put the javelin away. He explained to the second intrigued soldier that he had in fact seen me at the gates to Antonia's Tower and that I was not lying. That fortuitous encounter was going to serve me a lot...

The soldiers were in a hurry to catch up with the platoon that was escorting the Nazarene and I could soon see their torches, though I was surprised to discover the group had stopped in the middle of the road. When the pair of stragglers rejoined the Roman patrol, I insinuated it might be wiser for me to stay at the rear or continue on my way to Jerusalem. However, the sentinel who seemed very honored with my friendship, indicated that I should follow him and I did.

As I approached the platoon's commander, I understood why they had halted. The leader of the Levites was wrangling to bring the Nazarene to Caiaphas' residence. But the Roman *optio*, a sort of lieutenant centurion¹ who was responsible for the prisoner's arrest and custody, objected to this decision as he believed his orders were accurate: Jesus of Nazareth was to be conducted into the presence of the former high priest Annas. (Apparently Caiaphas' powerful and influential in-laws maintained relations between the Roman governor and the Judaic priestly caste.)

The Levite police had to concede and Arsenius, the *optio* or Roman sub officer, ordered the patrol to resume the march to Jerusalem's lower district. Jesus was practically absent during the discussion. He kept his gaze lowered. Judas, for his part, was positioned between the two leaders—the Roman and the Levite—still the more he tried to engage them in dialog, the more they evaded his questions and remained in a complete violent silence. When I asked about the reason for the Temple police's and the *optio*'s attitudes toward Judas, the mercenary who spoke Greek responded with a blunt statement.

“He's a traitor.”

We were just a few meters from the bridge that linked the foot of Mount Olivet to the esplanade at the bottom of the Temple's eastern wall, when something disturbing and unforeseen happened. Both “captains” marched at the front of the procession Judas was between them. The Roman patrol followed immediately behind, tightly surrounding Jesus. Finally, the band of Levites and the Sanhedrin's servants trailed wrapped in their mantles and furious about the Roman officer's categorical decisions to deliver the Galilean to the former priest. I walked to the left of the group next to the last of the legionnaires.

Suddenly John the Evangelist appeared on the right walking up to the Teacher. I was stupefied before the disciple's courageous decision. I noticed that John must have lost his cloak during the anarchy which occurred when the Rabbi's followers fled. He was only wearing a short tunic, which went down to his knees, and a sword in his sash. The Temple police were alarmed when they saw him and they warned their leader about the Galilean's presence. The platoon

¹ The *optio* is a sub officer directly under the command of a centurion. They ordinarily led small groups of troops, and answered to the officer in the disposition of the guards' administrative functions, military instruction, etc. According to Festus, they were given the name *optiones* “since, from that time, the centurions permitted them to choose or opt as they wished. Thus the word *optio* also applied to the act of choosing” [Major's note].

paused again and the captain of the Levites ordered his men to seize John and tie him up. Yet when the Caiaphas assassins were ready to bind him, Arsenius intervened again. This veteran sub officer, who was wise and noble, interposed between the apostle and the Levites.

“Halt! This man is neither a traitor nor a coward,” he exclaimed.

The Hebrews did not seem very willing to lose this opportunity and vehemently protested. The centurion’s adjutant’s eyes were riveted to those of the captain of the Sanhedrin’s guard. He ground his teeth under his badly shaven jaws and raised his baton until it was a palm’s length from the Levite leader’s forehead.

“I told you this man is neither a traitor nor a coward. I saw him before and he didn’t draw his sword to resist. Now he is brave for coming here to be with the Teacher.” He repeated in a menacing tone. As he made his stick whistle with a series of short curt blows to his wrist, the one responsible for the Jews, moved back in fright.

“Let no one put their hands on him!” he added. “Roman law allows all prisoners to have one friend accompany them before the tribunal. Therefore, no one will prevent this Galilean from remaining at the defendant’s side.”

The Roman *optio*’s scorn and hatred for Jews in general and these Jews in particular must have been considerable to motivate what was in my opinion a fundamentally unusual decision. The sub officer admired John’s audacious gesture, but he also sought the pure act of humiliating and contradicting these cowards who were unable to face Jesus by themselves. (Following our arrival at Annas’ palace, Joseph of Arimathea described Iscariot’s tortuous machinations, with the Levites he had showed up with, in a luxury of detail. He also included the solicitation at the Roman garrison for an escort to accompany them in the Teacher’s arrest.

And I must add that upon my return from this first “grand journey”, I consulted prominent experts in Roman law and jurisprudence to investigate if in fact, the law the *optio* applied actually existed. But so far my search has been fruitless. The ancient Romans, like the traditional English today, were not very fond of laws as we interpret them. One’s “rights” were not precisely based on the “laws”¹. According to the scholars I questioned, this arrangement by the sub officer Arsenius was not in conflict with the mores of that era and above all the authority which occupied that Roman province. There existed a discretionary aspect as to when to administer justice or how to treat a prisoner, therefore the sub officer’s conduct was perfectly plausible at least to the scholars of Roman law. We cannot forget that the lords and masters of life and property in that revolutionary country continued being the Romans.

This providential order of the *optio* from Antonia’s Tower cleared another one of my questions. How was it possible that John Zebedee was the only apostle to state in his writings that he had been an “eyewitness” to many of the events that took place that Friday? Logically, if it had not been for this invaluable “help” from the sub officer Arsenius, Jesus’ follower would have had many problems being able to attend the interrogation and the crucifixion. As it was, it would have been almost impossible for the priestly caste—who loathed the Teacher and his disciples—to yield and accept the free presence of any of the prisoner’s friends. Only a superior imposition, which in

¹ Some experts point out the possibility that the said “law” is really a matter of an adaptation which is very particular to the regime. It guarantees a hearing before a judge through the so-called *praedes vendere* who serves to prevent the detention of the defendant. This is similar to the way it is done nowadays with a “bail bond” (an abuse of terminology) which is not a personal guarantee but a monetary deposit [Major’s note].

this event proceeded from the Roman authority, could permit John to offer the least amount of restricted support on the eve of Christ's death.

As a precautionary measure, the Roman sub officer ordered one of his men to disarm John. The platoon continued along the road. The Roman sub officer's public recognition of John's courage represented a hard blow to Judas' dignity. Ashamed, with his head lowered and his brow wrinkled, Judas lessened his pace until he was the only one lagging behind. And that is how he came to Annas' house.

John wisely did not speak to the Teacher at any moment neither did he give the boy the slightest attention. In the current circumstances, it was not sensible. Nevertheless, as we filed through the deserted streets of Jerusalem's, I contrived to position myself beside Zebedee and ask him about the rest of his men and especially why he made the dangerous decision to accompany Jesus.

The apostle seemed cheered a little at the proof of not finding himself all alone. His eyes were red from continuous crying. He told me once they had evaded the soldiers, he and Peter had decided to follow Jesus. He only knew that the others had fled in the direction of the campsite. In the ensuing silence, John had recalled the Teacher's instructions to stay at his side, so he hurried to rejoin him. While Peter, if he had not changed his mind—could be found a certain distance behind us camouflaged in the undergrowth.

At around a quarter past two in the morning, the procession stopped before Annas' residence, which was very close to the Zion Gate at the far west end of the city and a short distance, according to my calculations, from John Mark's house. There, facing the wrought-iron gate that opened into the spacious garden in front of the palace, the Roman sub officer officially released the prisoner to the leader of the Levites. But prior to doing so, he addressed one of the legionnaires so all of us could hear.

"Go with the accused and watch that these miserable people do not kill him without Pontius' consent," he ordered. "Keep them from assassinating him and guard this Galilean," he said referring to John. "I give you permission to stay with him at every moment. Look carefully at what is happening..."

And then he turned around and departed with his platoon. When I said goodbye to the mercenaries, I secretly placed silver money in each of their hands, thanking them for their assistance and requesting that they speak to the companion whom Arsenius had designated to protect Jesus and John, before they returned to Antonia's Tower, and ask him if I could accompany them. The infantry men smiled. Without formulating a single question, the one who spoke Greek agreed with the other soldier that my wishes would be fulfilled. Another discreet and opportune silver denarii placed into the latter's fist terminally dispelled all suspicions and misgivings. For the moment, my presence at Annas' headquarters was guaranteed.

Once we reached the courtyard, some of the Temple guards took their leave and moved away from the former high priest's sumptuous home. Several of Annas' servants came precipitously to the Levite's leader. He ordered them to alert the master of the house.

"The prisoner has arrived," he announced, pointing to the Nazarene who stood motionless in the middle of the square flagstones with his hands still tied behind his back. John continued standing beside the Teacher as did the Roman mercenary who endeavored not to lose sight of the two of them as well as the small group of police and servants from the Temple who did

everything they could to start a bonfire. They piled sundry logs in one of the dark corners of the courtyard and, after sprinkling it with oil, touched the torches to the cut wood to ignite the fire.

The temperature had fallen several degrees and nearly all of those present gathered around the improvised fire. In a few minutes only the disciple, the Roman soldier, Jesus, and I remained in the center of the courtyard along with the Levite's leader who continued holding the thick rope with which he had bound the Son of Man. Before us stood a regal two-story mansion with a stone carved façade and one delicate, semi-circular marble staircase. At the door, which was illuminated on both sides by oil lanterns, was a short heavy set woman who smiled nonstop.

But my initial exploration of the area was interrupted by Judas' sudden appearance. The traitor had just arrived at Annas' house, yet when he saw Jesus and John, he lingered behind the tall iron fence which rose above the stone wall. Within minutes, he withdrew and followed the same road taken by the group of Levite police. His facial expression was hard and impassive. He did not show any sign of remorse. On the contrary, during those moments I had the feeling Iscariot was enjoying the "spectacle." Essentially his revenge against the Teacher and the disciple who loved Jesus was beginning to bear fruit.

John also saw Judas. However, the Nazarene did not because he still had his back to the entry gates. The Galilean's facial expression had not changed. He remained steadfast, solemn, and slightly pale. He had barely raised his eyes on a couple of occasions.

Soon after the traitor's departure, I was startled again. Now it was Peter who found himself on the other side of the iron fence. I did not understand how he had not passed by Judas...He paced nervously from one end of the iron gate to the other as he tried to get noticed. Once John saw him, he signaled me with his eyes. I nodded, indicating I was already aware of him.

I sincerely felt pity for the impetuous but warm, good-natured apostle. When Simon realized that John and I had noted his presence, he grasped the iron bars with both of his hands and began to pantomime words with his mouth as John and I watched him without comprehending his intentions. Finally, he pointed his finger at his chest and motioned with his head and his lips making us understand that he also wanted to enter the house. I stared at him and shrugged my shoulders. What could I do?

At that instant, one of Annas' servants left the mansion and beckoned the Levite's leader to enter. I turned to Peter and read the most profound desolation on his face. When we crossed the threshold, John addressed the woman who stood in the doorway. He begged her to let his friend in, as he made a hand gesture toward Peter. I was bewildered to hear the stout matron agree to Zebedee's request without blinking and even in a cordial tone. She called him by his first name too. (Long after this agonizing dawn, John clarified the situation: the hostess' friendly behavior was not a secret to anyone. He as well as his brother James were old friends of the woman and the house servants. On numerous occasions, John and his family—especially his mother Salome, who was Annas' distant relative—had been invited to the former high priest's mansion.)

While the Levites' leader guided the Nazarene inside the mansion, the porter descended the stairs and proceeded to clear the entrance for Peter who was frightened and dejected. It was here that I was seized by an ominous doubt. On Simon's entrance, I remembered the famous fiery denials the disciple would soon produce—if the gospels had not erred. Matthew, Mark, and Luke reported that the denials occurred at the high priest Caiaphas' headquarters. I presumed John's testimony, which also mentions the incident in Annas' courtyard, must also be correct.

As soon as the disciple perceived my indecision, he urged me to accompany him. Nevertheless, I choose to stay in the yard next to Peter. So that is what I told him. After all, what might happen inside Caiaphas in-laws' house, was perfectly "covered" by John's presence. I was half reassured by this reasoning, so without losing a second, I went to find Peter.

On seeing me, the man embraced me unable to contain his tears. He was confused. He could not understand what had happened and why Jesus had allowed himself to be arrested so easily.

"He's capable of resurrecting the dead, yet he didn't lift a single finger to stop them from capturing him..." he wailed again and again. "And what is worse," he added in a deaf rage "is that he didn't even give us the opportunity to help him... Why? Why?"

With great difficulty, I tried to console his spirit. But his limited intelligence and his passion for Jesus did not allow him to think clearly. His mind was a whirlwind where equal parts of his hatred for Judas and the members of the Sanhedrin were mixed with fear for his own safety and that of the group, and an immense uncertainty about the course events were taking.

Although it is sad and almost unbelievable, I do not tire of insisting that neither he nor Peter nor the rest of the apostles had understood this level of the Son of Man's true mission... Simon started to shake. I did not know if it was from fear and distress or the cold. In any case, we were unconsciously moving closer to the fire where half a dozen Levites and Annas' servants were sitting "Turkish style" and warming themselves very close to the bonfire.

Peter and I continued standing with his eyes lost in the flames. Just then, the woman who opened the wrought iron gate exited the house again and stationed herself beneath the door's lintel. The police were discussing the arrest and bad-mouthing the Romans. One of them alluded to the Rabbi's motion which had miraculously cured Malchus. However, the Levite's timid defense was immediately stifled by several of his companions who attributed the success to "another obvious proof of Jesus' demonic power".

One of the fervent defenders of this hypothesis reminded his cohorts how demons were really fallen angels who were capable of being invisible, adopting the strangest forms, and almost always leaving footprints similar to those of a rooster. Another temple servant roundly opposed this explanation, arguing that demons were actually Sons of Adam who were fathered when he was 130 years old...

The dispute was at full boil when the porter unexpectedly advanced towards the fire. Without losing her continual mischievous smile, she scolded Peter, who was on the opposite side of the circle.

"Aren't you also one of that man's disciples?"

The police turned to look at Simon with threatening expressions. The apostle's thoughts were very far from this sudden attack. He opened his eyes excessively wide without giving much importance to what was taking place. Basically, the question was so absurd as to be malicious. If Peter had reacted with the least amount of coolness and commonsense, he would have realized the matron was the same person who opened the gate at John's request. Hence, it was evident the woman was cognizant of the friendship between the two. Nevertheless, once again his fear took over his rational brain.

Almost stuttering he said, “I am not...”

The porter remained impassively by the fire, but her attention soon strayed to the conversation between the servants and the Levites, which had shifted to become engaged upon the topic of demons. None of those present seemed to give much importance to Peter’s presence or to his possible connection to the prisoner. If the apostle had noticed the Levite’s general attitude, he probably would have overcome his panic.

When I glanced at him, his face was flushed. Simon avoided my gaze as he bit his lips and nervously crumpled the pleats on his cloak. All at once, I realized he was not carrying his usual sword. No doubt, he had lost it during the flight or perhaps he had gotten rid of it before coming to Annas’ house.

The police officer, whose story about the demons had been interrupted by the matron’s arrival, resumed the thread of his exposition, making us see that the Galilean could well be one of those “Sons” of Adam. But the Levite’s explanation did not satisfy the majority. Another one of the Sanhedrin’s servants added that, in general “those demons only inhabited swamps, ruins, and the shade of certain trees...”

“That,” he pointed out, “is not the case with this Galilean. We’ve all seen him preach openly in the middle of the Gentile’s Courtyard. What type of demon can do that?”

“And don’t forget,” added a third person who was present, “the Rabbi from Galilee has healed a lot of cripples¹.”

I was so absorbed in this group discussion that I was not aware of a figure behind me. I jumped as I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Joseph of Arimathea! I rose immediately, walked away from the fire, and went to the center of the courtyard with this venerable man. He and I burned with a mutual desire to interrogate each other. I announced that the Teacher had been taken into Annas’ presence and gave him an account of what happened on Simon “the leper’s” premises and on the way to Mount Olivet.

Joseph listened quietly. Occasionally, he moved his head in an expression of concern. Of course, he was current with Iscariot’s adventures. John Mark’s swift warning had enabled him to travel to the Temple very quickly and control Judas’ next steps. There he met Ishmael, the Sadducee, who was instrumental to his search.

The man from Arimathea made a move to enter the mansion, but I held him back begging him to tell me about the traitor’s actions. Without wishing to, I began to bombard him with all kinds of questions. Who was the mysterious friend who accompanied him to the Temple? What had happened inside the sanctuary? Why had Judas waited until midnight to carry out the Nazarene’s arrest? Why did he walk ahead of the platoon? Joseph asked me to calm down.

“In the first place,” stressed the elderly man, “the companion whom you are referring to and whom Judas picked up before he arrived at the Temple is called Annas. It is his cousin. He is the same one who spoke to Ishmael and introduced the traitor to the priests on Wednesday

¹ The Levite’s argument was correct. According to the information *Santa Claus* provided, the deep superstitions of these people considered demonic attack to be the principle cause of crippling brides and grooms and their coteries of “honor”. It was then logical that a supposed demon (Jesus) would heal the disabled...[Major’s note].

morning. When I came to the sanctuary, both of them were conversing with the chief porter for that particular time of the week¹. On this occasion, the turn had fallen to the Levite Yohanan ben Gudgeda, an especially brutal individual. To give you an idea of the quality of his character, I will say that not only would he hit guards with his baton in order to discover if they were sleeping, but from time to time, he would also set their clothes on fire...

“Well now, this captain of the night watch listened attentively to Judas’ information. The traitor and his cousin explained that the Teacher could be found at that very moment in a house in the lower district—in Elijah Marks house, as you well know, and that his arrest would be convenient to accomplish. According to Iscariot, only two of the twelve men dining in the cenacle were armed: Peter and Simon the Zealot. Still Judas warned Gudgeda that it would be careless not to be on the alert, since about sixty disciples and a formidable arsenal was located at the campsite at Gethsemane.

“Thank heaven the traitor’s plans did not go as he expected.”

“Why?” inquired the august man with great curiosity. “Judas arrived at the Temple earlier than he had arranged and many comings and goings were necessary between the porter, the chief of Caiaphas’ headquarters, and the Temple’s various departments in order to gather a sufficient number of police. At that time, it was impossible to lay hold of the guards who were mounted inside and outside of the sanctuary and I say this is why the platoon’s departure was delayed.

“The difficulty in finding off-duty men was such that in the end, the desperate, blood thirsty Yohanan was forced to ask the high priest for support from Caiaphas’ friends and servants. If I recall correctly, they left the Temple with a total of thirty-five or forty bailiffs who were armed with all sorts of maces and sticks...”

“But what about the Roman escort?” I interrupted, unable to contain myself.

“Wait, Jason. As I said, fortunately things were not happening as they had been planned. The Sanhedrin wanted to arrest the Teacher when the city was empty. This was also Judas’ intention, since from what I could deduce, he was afraid of the reactions from Jesus’ men and their possible retaliation.

“So Ismael was in charge of following the platoon while I stayed in the Temple in case of any new developments. But the traitor and his group surrounded Marks’ house when the Teacher and the eleven disciples were just about to leave for the olive grove. That is the information Ismael received from Elijah.”

¹ I think I explained earlier that the Levites, who numbered about 10,000, were distributed into 24 sections (as were the priests) that formed weekly rotations. Each section had a leader. In addition to the “lower” services, music, and those similar to the current “sacristans” the Levites were responsible for the Temple’s security. Philo of Alexandria describes their functions in detail: ‘Some porters were at the doors, others on the Temple esplanade, the *pronaos* or lobby; while the rest patrolled the surrounding areas. Of course, there were two guards: one for the day shift and one for the night. So the watch was divided into three groups as follows: the porters at the Temple’s exterior doors, the guards in the lobby which separated the Gentile’s Courtyard from the sanctuary’s holy place, and the patrols of the aforementioned courtyard. During the day, they also guarded the Women’s Courtyard. At sunset, they closed the doors to the sanctuary and then the night police took their positions—21 in total. The sacred area—which was not accessible to the Levites—was guarded by the priests. The supervisors for these Levites were called “strategists” as mentioned in Luke [22:4]. Indeed several of them were present at Jesus’ capture [Major’s note].

“Then Judas did not manage to see Jesus and the eleven disciples.”

“No, he missed by a very small margin. If the patrol had not been delayed so much, I am sure the Teacher’s arrest would have succeeded then. As soon as Elijah saw Judas and the armed men, he realized their baleful intentions, refused to speak to Judas Iscariot, and kicked him out of his house.”

“He kicked him out?”

“Yes, and I fear that offense will cause poor Elijah to lose face.”

This was something I did not understand. So I asked, “If Judas knew the Teacher’s habits, why didn’t he proceed to Gethsemane?”

The trace of a sad smile appeared on the man from Arimathea’s face.

“If you knew Judas, you would understand. Since Judas felt humiliated and frightened at the host’s violent reaction, he must have understood that the Rabbi’s followers at the campsite on Simon’s property would not be any less radical. Based upon Ishmael’s account, the traitor grew increasingly nervous, explaining that Nazarene and his friends could have gone in the direction of Mount Olivet.

“Yet when the Levites urged him to continue in pursuit, Iscariot stopped them, maintaining it was not wise to confront sixty men armed with swords. This change of tactics meant the temple police might have to fight and capture the apostles or at least the leaders of the group at Gethsemane. Caiaphas’ orders were not exactly these. To the high priest, the only important man was the Galilean.”

“What did they do then?”

“Well, the platoon found themselves at a complicated crossroad. Rather than taking a risk which was an initiative that had not been considered by Caiaphas, they decided to go back to the Temple. This appeased Judas a little, but it made the made the Levite’s leaders more apprehensive.

“Just as I expected, a secret meeting between Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin’s staunchest supporters was set for midnight. It was about eleven o’clock when Judas and the group returned to the Temple that some of the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees were starting to gather in the “Hall of Hewn Stones.” The police’s anxiety about appearing before Caiaphas without the prisoner was very understandable. Time seemed to rush upon them and for a moment, Judas as well as the priests began to contemplate the idea of postponing the arrest. They had not prepared a force sufficiently strong and powerful to chance invading the garden and capturing the Teacher.

“For an instant, Ishmael and I commenced to believe everything was over and Jesus would be free...” Joseph surmised with extreme bitterness. “It was vain hope...Caiaphas is not a man who gives in easily. And his hatred for Jesus was such that he did not hesitate to propose a solution that even repulsed his henchmen: request an armed escort from the Roman governor.

“The astute high priest argued that now the arrest of the imposter would not be problematic and incidentally, the responsibility for the arrest would fall on the forces of the foreign occupation. Some members of the Sanhedrin tried to convince Caiaphas to renounce the

project by alluding to Jesus' constant practice of nonviolence. They thought, with good reason, that the Galilean would not allow his men to draw their swords. But Judas intervened again: once more his cowardice was a float. He agreed with the priests, yet he would not accept that the disciples would obey the teacher. He added, 'Caiaphas' suggestion seems excellent to me. Let us go to Antonia's Tower.'

"The priests appointed a representative from the Sanhedrin to proceed to the Roman's general barracks. But the centurion on duty refused to provide an escort. The officer explained, 'It is very late and besides this order must be given by Pontius Pilate.' The priests insisted and the centurion had no other remedy than calling Civilis who, as you know, is the commanding officer in charge of the garrison at Antonia's.

"Our mutual friend was very annoyed by this visit. He asked them the reason why he should supply them with an escort. And before the priests could react, Judas faced Civilis and warned him that Jesus was part of a group of Zealots who had secretly "settled" on the property at Gethsemane¹. Iscariot's vile lie made the centurion vacillate. You are aware that the Romans viciously pursue the revolutionaries.

¹ When I consulted the module's computer about the "zealots" or *biryonim*, *Santa Claus* gave me the following information: This revolutionary and clandestine movement, which is similar to existing terrorist groups in Europe and America—began to deploy its guerilla activities and its relentless harassment of the Roman military during Augustus' reign. In the beginning, it was under the leadership of a Jew from Galilee, Judas ben Hezekiah, who had gained distinction during Herod's time for commanding the assault on a real military arsenal and for his excesses and fires. On receiving news that these bands were devastating the country, Varus rushed to launch two legions from Antioch. They leveled the cities of Zippori (Sepphoris) and Emmaus and conquered the inhabitants and supporters of the rebel Judas ben Hezekiah and sold them as slaves. Varus ordered the capture and execution of all of the Galilean's "partisans" and crucified more than 2,000 guerillas. However, the leader Judas ben Hezekiah managed to escape. With the aid of another extremist, a Pharisee called Zadok, he founded a slow but profound movement for a secret struggle against Imperial Rome. During Jesus of Nazareth's infancy and juvenile years, this movement, which adopted the name Zealots began to win adepts and spread like an oil stain throughout Israel. Moreover, Galilee was the heart of and the cradle for these patriotic extremists who ceaselessly harassed the Roman troops in Caesarea and the rest of the Jewish nation. Camouflaged under an ardent religious spirit, these "terrorists" from the first century took up arms under a doctrine that can be synthesized into the following principles.

1. The Reign of God over Israel is incompatible with any foreign dominion. The acceptance of the Roman Caesar as king is a violation of Divine Law. God is the only king of any people.
2. The cult of the Caesar is abominable in all of its forms. The zeal of many of the zealots reached the extreme of not even touching the Roman currency which had Caesar's image on it. The payment of the taxes to Rome is idolatry and apostasy since it implies a submission to Rome and to the Emperor. (The source of the Zealot nationalism that surged from Judas ben Hezekiah which was precisely rooted in Augustus' order that all members of the Hebrew nation must be registered. In reality, a political reason rather than an economic one motivated this census operation. And it outraged the Jews.)
3. The Jews should not wait passively for the arrival of the Kingdom of God. It is necessary to collaborate with god by means of revolution and holy war. They believed in god's miracles and thought these should always be in the service to the idea of liberation.
4. The principle objective of its armed fighting was the attainment of liberty and political independence for Israel. The Zealots had taken deliverance from Egypt by Yahweh as a symbol and model for imitation.
5. According to the Zealot's philosophy, conversion to God's way necessarily requires disobedience to Roman authority and a readiness to sacrifice money, tranquility and even life for the good of the principle 'saviors.'

“Even so, the officer in charge of the legion ordered them to wait while he went to the governor’s residence. Between one thing and another the Sanhedrin lost a total of one hour. Pilate had gone to bed. At first, he knew nothing about the subject. Regardless, Caiaphas’ envoys were relentless, in their determination, they forced Civilis to have a second meeting with Pontius by declaring they had discovered a considerable arsenal at the campsite and they pointed out that if they successfully captured the “leader”—Jesus of Nazareth—the governor would achieve an important victory from the Caesar’s perspective.

“Finally, maybe just to get rid of the odious priests, Pilate gave the authorization and the centurion on duty was entrusted the command of a platoon of thirty or forty infantrymen...I don’t know the exact number, to his *optio* Arsenius. This was how the troops left Jerusalem at full speed, led by Judas. You know the rest....”

Yes, I know it. Yet many details remained unexplained. For example, why did Iscariot distance himself from the platoon? It would be logical, if he were guiding the soldiers, the Levites, and their servants from the Temple to the property at Gethsemane to reveal the Rabbi’s identity to this group, that he would not be separated from his henchmen at any moment. Furthermore, if the Roman sub officer’s intention was to capture the supposed “head” Zealot and his posse, why was Arsenius content to seize only Jesus of Nazareth? Why did he not launch an assault on the camp?

(As I mentioned earlier, that was one of the first unknowns that was clarified the next day—on Saturday morning. As for the second, Pontius himself gave me an elucidation on my next visit to Antonia’s Tower.) Of course, Joseph could not clear up my doubts. Neither he nor Ishmael dared to join the platoon that departed from the Temple via the Golden Gate a few minutes after twelve-thirty that night.

In regards to my question about why the Teacher had been conveyed to Annas’ house instead of being immediately conducted into the Caiaphas’ presence, Arimathea who was evidently very tired, remarked, “You are lucky Jason. You don’t have to live with the constant intrigues of these impure men. I am not certain of it, but my understanding is Annas and his son-in-law agreed to detain the Teacher there until the Caiaphas could assemble the maximum number of loyal priests. With this approach, the jury will be implacable. Plus the law dictates that the Sanhedrin’s council cannot meet before the first offering.”

“And what time will the first sacrifice occur?”

“At three o’clock in the morning. You see, we still have time. Perhaps it will produce the miracle that we all want.”

Joseph concluded his detailed exposition stating that in order not to raise suspicions among his own men and servants, that reptile called Caiaphas had instructed two of his confidantes to pay the Roman *optio* splendidly so he would even oppose the leader of the Temple police and lead Jesus of Nazareth to his father-in-law’s Annas’ palace.

On seeing all of this, it is easy to understand the confusion of some of Jesus’ disciples and apostles—such as Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot—who believed from the very beginning that the Galilean’s doctrine had a lot in common with the national liberation movement. The Zealots were the direct cause of the bloody revolts against Rome in the years 68 to 70 AD as well as the one recorded in the year 135 [Major’s note].

Joseph of Arimathea then took his leave as he declared he was going to enter the former high priest's residence and do everything he could, including attempting to bribe the elder Annas so Jesus could be set free. On seeing him disappear inside the house, I could not repress a feeling of sadness for the Teacher's faithful follower. It was his right to foster hope. How could he know hope had died much earlier in the garden at Gethsemane.

Half-hidden in the darkness on the patio, I informed Eliseo about the course of events and requested him to warm me a shortly before daybreak. At that instant, it was three o'clock in the morning. I returned to the fire.

Peter was so shut up with his thoughts that he had not even noticed Joseph of Arimathea's arrival. He was sitting behind the Levites covering his baldness with his mantle. I suppose this gesture had more to do with his burning desire not to be discovered and denounced again and less with the pervasive cold.

The Sanhedrin's police and hired assassins continued taking turns relating the traditions and legends about demons. All seemed calm at Annas' house. I did not perceive any movement nor signs of violence or unrest. Therefore, I erroneously assumed the interrogation with the former high priest was progressing without incident...

I must have been sitting very close to Peter for just over half hour when a second woman approached the huddle. She was much younger than the first one. I deduced from her clothing that she was another domestic. She stood next to the porter and I saw her bend down and whisper something into the porter's left ear while she pointed at Peter. The newcomer squinted and strained her eyes to see. From the manner in which she squinted, I assumed she was shortsighted. Then she walked a few steps around the crowd surrounding the bonfire. Once she was beside the apostle, she knocked off the mantle that covered Simon's head with a slap as she shouted.

"Aren't you one of the Galilean's followers?"

The Hebrew woman's unexpected exclamation equally startled the Levites and Peter. The disciple went pale as lime and stumbled to his feet to face the young woman.

"I don't know the man!" he yelled at his inquisitor with great force, "And I'm not one of his disciples!" Peter put so much vehemence into his words that the arteries on his neck stood out and his face turned purple. The eyes of Jesus' terrified friend nearly popped out of their sockets as a thin thread of saliva dropped from the left corner of his mouth. Peter's aggression caused the frightened servant to retreat and flee from the place to the front door of the house.

This time the servants and the police kept their eyes riveted on the wretched fisherman for a few seconds. Stunned, Peter turned around and walked away from the fire. I thought he intended to depart from the estate, and I missed the chance to go after him. But no. Despite his weakness, Simon still loved the teacher. How little and how inadequate are the writings about the internal torment of this primitive Galilean who was consciousness of his errors, dominated by his survival instinct, yet forced by his temperament down a tragic alley without an exit.

It took a resolute effort on my part not to run to his side and console him. However, the objective of my mission managed to win out and I waited. Silent and stooped, Simon leaned against the fence, striking his head against the iron bars. I feared for his physical safety. Rather than hurting him, those repeated dry head butts seemed to restore some of his serenity. Soon, after he dried his tears on the sleeve of his mantle, he rejoined the group.

(The change in the apostle's attitude as he returned to the fire, honestly made me reflect and even forget his detestable and to some extent understandable behavior. Churches, especially the Catholic ones, have judged and categorized these episodes of denial as a lamentable event on the part of Simon Peter. However, very few theologians and moralists seemed to have considered a "mitigating factor" which says a lot in the "renegade's" favor. Peter could have left Annas' courtyard after the first betrayal. Yet he did not do it. Nor did he do it after the second and the third and the fourth...For though the evangelists cite three denials, there was actually an additional one. Although, it is true this "extra" denial did not have a public character. With all of this, I wish to propose that even if Peter had not behaved with dignity, it is no less true that his mere presence in the place redeems a good measure of his moments of weakness.)

The stubborn Galilean was not willing to imitate his companions who, overcome with fear, absconded over the mountain. On the contrary, he sat down among the servants who, at any moment, could become his accusers and persecute him. At least this was true for the people who huddled around the flames at that time.

Nevertheless, as his bad luck willed, in a short while the group increased by a half dozen priests who appeared to have arrived at Caiaphas residence to coordinate and control the task of transferring the Nazarene. After seeking information from the Levites gathered there, four of the priests went inside the house; the other two remained at the fire. From the first moment, they were attracted to the lively conversation about the superstitions of the Jewish people.

Someone had mentioned "Lilith" and the controversy re-ignited. Evidently, "Lilith" was a nickname given to one of the most infamous demonesses. Most of those present accepted her existence and classified her as a demoness. This curious "spirit" focused her attacks on men—as a woman would. More specifically, the males she attacked dared to be at home alone.

"And only the divine, blessed be his name, knows when she can present herself," clinched another one of the Sanhedrin's servants.

The belief in question was not very well received by one of the priests named Mordecai who was known as "Pethahiah" in Jerusalem as a consequence of his great aptitude for languages. I have referred to him before. (According to the people in the town, he knew more than seventy languages and dialects. Hence his sobriquet Pethahiah is from the word *pathach* which means to "open" in this case the meaning of words.)

This priest was also responsible for one of the "brushes" in the Temple and was a man of great culture who scoffed at such absurd tales. Pethahiah's guffaws aroused one of the police officer's outrage. First, he pointed at Peter, then to the inside of the mansion.

"You can laugh as much as you want, but look at this Galilean... You're the same one who helped with that triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. You didn't take the precaution of putting a fox tail on it or placing red cloth between the little donkey's eyes and setting him up as an offering to fortune¹."

¹ At the first opportunity, I asked *Santa Claus* for information on the main superstitions of the Jews of that era. And, among other things the fact emerged that one should not embark on any journey—no matter how short—without placing a foxtail or a red cape between the horse's eyes. For example, if two guests at a banquet throw small bread rolls, it is guaranteed that they will fall ill. Another superstition, which concerned the presence of demons in latrines, even suggested that one go to the said place with a lamb. This way the Jew could perform his necessities without any interference [Major's note].

At that instant, Simon committed a new mistake. He was so irritated by the deep-rooted Hebrew superstition that he interrupted the conversation with the intention of enlightening those present that the Rabbi from Galilee did not need to protect himself with such ridiculous devices. Since his power was so great that if he so wished he could bring fire down from Heaven and raze the Sanhedrin without even touching the innocent... The Temple servants and the Levites did not pay much attention to Peter's brave but untimely defense. However, Pethahiah instantly caught the apostle's hard Galilean accent and in confronting him, diverted the course of the conversation in a direction that opened Simon's flesh again.

"You must be of the captive's followers" he accosted. "This Jesus is a Galilean and your way of talking has betrayed you. You speak like a genuine Galilean."

Before Simon could react, one of the Sanhedrin's hired assassins, the same one who had mentioned Malchus' miraculous healing, confirmed Pethahiah's discovery and revealed to everyone what until then had gone unnoticed.

"You're the one who was on the road to Mount Olivet too," he cried out in alarm. "I saw you attack my relative."

That changed things. It was not only a more or less veiled charge of sharing the Galilean's doctrine, but also an accusation that could drag the apostle into a fulminating arrest for being guilty of assaulting one of the high priest's minions. And I believe it was this circumstance that Peter found himself in, which caused him to have a nervous breakdown. It was not an issue of denying Jesus, but evading the dangerous charge more than anything else.

Some of the Levites stood up, brandishing their clubs in a threatening manner. Then it was feasible for them to seize him, if a torrent of curses had not burst out of Peter's mouth. This obscene, embittered string of imprecations in which the Nazarene's broken friend included his own mother and children¹ bridled the police officers' impulse. When the Galilean was cornered, he finally swore by the gold in the Temple's treasury and opened his mantle so everyone could confirm he was not wearing a sword. In the end, those servile characters left him in peace. (Swearing and bearing witness on the Temple were significant, but doing so on the sanctuary's gold was even more so...)

Once Peter observed that the specter of his arrest had gone away, he turned around and very quietly distanced himself from the fire while ensuring that he did not raise any new suspicions. Devoid of strength with his spirit severely castigated, he shuffled his feet until he sat down on the marble stairs to the door. For a few minutes, I dared not move away from the fire. The unfortunate disciple buried his face in his small, calloused hands, accompanying his obvious despair with a halting but rhythmic oscillation of the front of his body.

It was four o'clock in the morning. The third and penultimate public denial had been completed. Silence continued to reign over Jerusalem. From time to time, I heard some of the numerous stray dogs I had seen on my way through the Holy City. It was nearly always those pitiful howls, which reminded me of another occurrence I had still not exactly registered. Peter had denied the Teacher three times; however, I had not heard the famous rooster's crowing. Not

¹ Jewish law permitted this type of curse against the mother and father—as long as the curse did not include the person's name. In this respect, Peter was careful not to mention the names of his ancestors [Major's note].

that the anecdote worried me excessively, even less so, when I was living—and suffering Simon’s anguish, as he stayed abject and completely devastated next to the gate at the entrance to Annas’ residence.

Yet I was able to tune my hearing while I waited for daybreak. As I pondered these particulars, I realized the roosters in Jerusalem could not have commenced their characteristic songs for the simple reason that there was still more than one hour before dawn. On that Friday April 7, the sun rose at 5:42 hours. The moment arrived when I began to believe the gospels were wrong again. The three denials had already been made and the single ion chronometer¹ on the module indicated it was four o’clock in the morning.

But no. There was no error: the different versions of the holy writings do not coincide one hundred percent. Yet I must conform to the strict order of events. When I estimated that Peter had composed himself, I left the group of Levites. I dropped down beside the disciple and put my hand on his left shoulder. Peter jumped again. He interrupted his almost catatonic motion when he saw it was I, and breathed a sigh of relief. For a long time we did not speak. What could I say to him? Soon Peter returned to normal. He stared at me as he expressed an idea that left me feeling even more confused.

“Jason did you see how skillfully I destroyed the servile Temple slaves’ accusations?”

An unanticipated mechanical smile accompanied Simon’s words. Then I comprehended that his primary concern in those moments was not—as I had believed—his ignoble act of renouncing his friend. Not at all: in my opinion, Peter had no clear consciousness of the fact that he had betrayed the Teacher. Rather his feelings of terror and distress were due to the threat of possible imprisonment. This suspicion, which was gaining ground in my heart, was vindicated by the apostle’s successive comments in which he congratulated himself for having been able to avoid being identified.

“Besides, those women had no moral authority. They can’t question me,” Peter added as he expressed his thoughts aloud. “They can’t interrogate me. They have no right. No, no, they don’t have it. They don’t have it.”

The Galilean repeated this canticle in a monotone as if he needed to justify his attitude. He never remembered or referred to Jesus. I do not think it is wrong if I say the fisherman did not realize the true and definitive manifestation of his dirty deed until he heard the rooster’s song in the city. Only then, did he recall the Teacher’s prophecy and assume the full weight of his infidelity.

¹ The Trojan Horse Project had equipped the module with a network of multiple clocks that were not based on the traditional technology of atomic clocks, which used radiation from cesium 133, but on the manipulation, or confinement of a single ion in a magnetic field trap using the finest laser beam. It is almost a certainty that this new time measurement system, with an accuracy which is often greater than 100,000 times that of an atomic clock, will definitely be incorporated into human life in the coming years. Through this delicate instrument, the sunrise or the appearance of the sun’s leading edge over the horizon in Jerusalem at an approximate altitude of 32° north—was estimated to occur at five hours 42 minutes local time on April 7 in the year 30. As for the sunset or disappearance of the sun’s trailing edge below the horizon, it was calculated to happen at 18 hours and 22 minutes which takes into account the refraction of the light from the event that emits about 34 seconds of an arc from the sun. For this latitude, the variation in the times of sunrise and sunset is approximately four minutes for each five degrees of separation in latitude [Major’s note].

When I questioned him about the fate of his peers, Peter did not know what to say. He knew nothing. He only recollected that as soon as he was a few meters from the stone wall at Simon's olive grove, something made him to stop his flight. Blind with rage he hid in the olives trees, ready to follow the chumps who had captured the Rabbi. We stayed there until a few minutes before dawn.

Then the porter and the servant who had compromised the apostle's safety, with her questions returned to renew their accusation. They came up to us without warning. The porter made an initial comment without raising her voice, using a serene tone devoid of malice.

"I'm sure you are one of Jesus' disciples. Not only because one of his followers asked me to let you in the gate and through to the courtyard, but also because my brother has seen you at the Temple with that man...So why deny it?"

For the fourth time, Peter denied any connection to the Nazarene. Although, on this occasion, his denial was colder and more calculated. His earlier reasoning about the women's lack of legal authority to accuse him and the fact that this new attack was not made publicly, were, in my opinion, decisive. Neither Peter nor I took account of them. Just as the light of a new day was a mere point in the east, we started to hear voices from inside the mansion. We stood up. Meanwhile, one of Annas' domestics left precipitously to alert the police. Everything happened so fast that we barely had time to react.

Suddenly the Teacher appeared on the threshold. His hands were still tied. John was next to him along with the Roman soldier and two of Annas' servants. For a minute, during which time the Temple Levites organized themselves to lead the prisoner, Jesus slowly raised his head and turned his face to the right where we stood a little more than two meters away. In the flickering reddish light of the torches, the Galilean's gaze was solely and exclusively riveted on his friend Peter. Jesus did not smile, yet his eyes conveyed a deep, chilling message of love and mercy. With this gesture, the giant reached the renegade's stunned heart as never before. There were no words left. The Teacher seemed to know what had transpired in the former high priest's courtyards during the last three hours. On receiving this intense message, Peter began to appreciate the profound gravity of his mistake.

The Roman soldier pushed the Nazarene violently from behind, forcing him to descend the stairs. A nearby rooster tore into the silent dawn with its long strident song. The Teacher's friend paled. The porter, who was still beside us, walked swiftly to the iron gate. It made a creaking sound as she opened it. Then the group of Levites, who always kept Jesus surrounded, left Annas' palace.

From that instant, and a good while hence, I never forgot how the sounds of the other roosters' songs filled the air during the first light of dawn on Friday April 7¹. I would have given anything to stay at Peter's side. I believe the apostle was never the same after the rooster crowed.

¹ It is not certain but some exegetes rely on the rabbinical writings, in particular the *Bava Kamma* (VII.7-VII.10: 82b), to conclude that raising chickens was prohibited in Jerusalem. (It was thought that their scratching would produce unclean things.) According to the *Mishnah*, the crowing rooster was a signal for them to play the trumpets. This is also confirmed in the texts of the *Sukkah* (V.4), the *Tamid* (I.2), and the *Yoma* (I.8). Included in the information the computer provided was a reference to the *Mishnah*, which mentioned a rooster in Jerusalem that Yehuda ben Baba reported "had been stoned to death for killing a man." It seems the rooster had pierced a child's skull with its beak. In addition, the *Tosefta B.Q.* (VIII.10:361.29) states that raising birds in the Holy City was permissible as long as there was an orchard or a manure pile where they could peck and dig [Major's note].

It is true that the inexplicable wonder of the Teacher's resurrection affected him decisively. However, those denials always weighed on his soul. I am convinced he died then, if not all of him, a good part of Simon was scared, dull, and arrogant. I maintain that his spirit received the harshest blow...

Even so, my mission required me to stay as close as possible to the Nazarene. After a brief run, I caught up with John and the Roman soldier. I was surprised to see John Mark across from the entrance to the former high priest's palace. This time he was wearing a cloak. How had he arrived here? Although I could not stop to ask him, I did deduce that following his escape from the mercenaries who had arrested Jesus, he had trailed the Roman escort the same way John Zebedee and Peter had. The procession filed through Jerusalem's deserted streets as the trumpets from the Temple proceeded to awaken the population. I asked John if he knew where we were going.

"The priests sent a messenger to Caiaphas," he said, "who announced to the rat's father-in-law that the Sanhedrin's tribunal was ready. I fear we will know soon..."

At that instant Eliseo opened the connection to advise me that it was 5:42 am. A new meteorological report confirmed what we had already foreseen the day before: a constant rise in the barometric pressure, the increasing wind velocity, the risk of a sirocco. Effectively, this sunrise was not going to be as fresh as the previous ones.

The platoon pulled Jesus along quickly. So I hastened to question John Zebedee about what happened inside the house of the powerful and influential Annas. Just as I had suspected—always in reference to John's testimony—since he had not been separated from Jesus for a single moment, Annas made his acquaintance with the Galilean with a very peculiar slowness. In the Rabbi's presence, the former high priest displayed such an extreme lack of feeling, to suggest it had not been a result of the strategies forged between the Caiaphas and his father-in-law which caused Jesus to be detained in this secure place until the Sadducees, scribes, and Pharisees finished engaging the trap in which he was to appear before the high priest.

Joseph of Arimathea attended part of the interrogation and preferred to remain with Annas. He would complete John's narration hours later. Joseph explained that the Caiaphas' wily father-in-law had, from the very beginning, secretly intended to resolve the vexatious affair then and there. Patently familiar with his son-in-law's impulsive and violent character, he did not want the case against the Teacher to fall into his hands. Nevertheless, Jesus of Nazareth's unexpected position aborted his plans.

"Annas has known the Teacher for many years," reported the Rabbi's 'beloved disciple.' "Like everyone else in Israel, he too had heard talk about Jesus' signs, miracles, and teachings. On receiving Jesus in his private dwelling, Annas wished to dispense with the *optio's* representative and me. But the Roman soldier opposed him, warning that it was Pilate's order. As you know, the relations between this corrupt priest and the Romans are excellent and so he eventually relented. He sat in one of the chairs and watched the Teacher with great curiosity and without saying a single word for a long time. Then with his usual conceit and self-sufficiency, he addressed Jesus in the following terms.

"'You already know I have to do something about your teaching. You are disrupting the peace and order of our country.'

“The Teacher raised his head and stared at him, but he did not open his lips. Annas did not like this. His nerves began to fail. Unable to hide his rage, he demanded, ‘Tell me the names of your disciples!’ Yet the Teacher remained silent and continued to stare into the old reptile’s eyes without blinking.

“I swear Jason, I have rarely seen such majesty in our Teacher’s face. While Annas was angry in an instant, Jesus, who was standing and despite being tied up, showed this bastard his true greatness.”

Notwithstanding the circumstances, John spoke about the Galilean with the same or more enthusiasm, if that is possible, that he had on Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem.

“Then to my astonishment, and I suppose Jesus’ too, Annas changed tactics,” Zebedee continued. “Finally he suggested to the Teacher that he was ready to forget everything on one condition.”

This was a new idea for me too. As we climbed the narrow streets of the lower district with the clear purpose of reaching the Sanhedrin’s headquarters, which were located in the outer zone southwest of the Temple and very close to what is known today as the Wall of Lamentations. I gave my full attention to the disciples’ words.

“Do you know what he was capable of doing? Annas proposed to pardon his life if he would leave Palestine immediately. But, the Teacher didn’t even react. This new silence exasperated the former high priest even more. He struck the arms of the chair and shouted at Jesus, ‘Don’t you think I’m being very generous with you? Don’t you know how powerful I am? I can determine the result of your upcoming trial.’

“For the first time, Jesus spoke to Annas, ‘You know you will never have power over me without my father’s permission. Some would wish to kill the son of Man because they are ignorant and do not know what else to do. You, my friend, already have an idea about what you are going to do. But how can I reject the light of god?’

“The Teacher’s unexpected kindness to this snake defeated Annas and confused me. The old man began to cavil. I suppose he was searching for a new approach to ruin Jesus. After a while, he asked again, ‘What are you trying to teach the people? Who are you claiming to be?’ The Teacher did not evade any of the questions, instead he addressed Annas very firmly, ‘You know very well I have spoken plainly to the world. I have taught in the synagogues many times and in the Temple where Jews and gentiles have listened to me. I have said nothing in secret. For what reason are you interrogating me about my teachings? Why not summon my audience and be informed by them? All of Jerusalem has heard me. And so have you: yet you do not understand my teachings.’

“Before Annas could respond, one of the house servants turned to the Teacher and slapped him violently, saying ‘How dare you answer the high priest that way?’ Oh Jason, how my blood burned!”

When I expressed an interest in Jesus’ reaction, John shrugged his shoulders, pointed at the Teacher who was walking barely a meter in front of us and said, “I didn’t see a shadow of hatred or resentment in his eyes. He simply faced the Boethusian butt licker with the same transparency and docility that he had directed towards Annas and said, ‘My friend, if I have said something evil, bear witness against me. But if it is true, why abuse me?’” Then I asked the

disciple if this slap had made Jesus' nose bleed. John said no. At the time the Galilean appeared in the doorway to Annas' mansion, his face did not show signs of violence. At least I could not detect any.

For some time I observed how Peter followed us from a short distance. I kept turning my head to check if the stray solitary man continued trailing us, but on one occasion, as we approached the arch, which is actually named Robinson, I saw Simon sitting at the foot of the south wall that separates Jerusalem's two largest neighborhoods. From the way the disciple dropped to the cobblestones with his head in his hands, it was unnecessary to say he was defeated. During those hours, he was completely devastated. Since I did not know the final outcome of the matter, I did not put my hand in the fire with respect to his luck. Unfortunately, I never saw him again.

John, who at that time was not current with his friend's denials, finished his narrative.

"Annas made a gesture of disapproval at his servant's brutal hitting of the Teacher, but his pride is such that he did not make any comment. He merely rose from his seat and left the room. He did not return to see us until two hours had passed."

"Did Jesus say anything during that interval?"

"No," John answered, "The Teacher, the servants, the soldier, and I stayed there in silence, without moving. At the end of this time, Annas returned to the room, approached Jesus and resumed the interrogation.

"'You consider yourself the messiah—the liberator of Israel?"

"'Jesus raised his head again and with the same calmness said, 'Annas you have known me from my youth and you know I don't pretend to be anything more or less than my father's emissary. He has sent me to all men, both Jews and gentiles.'

"Yet the former high priest was not satisfied and repeated the question, 'I have heard it said that you claim to be the messiah. Is it true?"

"The Teacher waited before answering. For a moment, I thought he did not want to speak. But now, I believe he did—and with such conviction Jason! Finally, he said, 'You have said it!' That was when the priests entered. They came on behalf of Caiaphas, went to Annas, and murmured something in his ear. However, I cannot tell you what. I suppose it had a lot to do with the Sanhedrin's Council. As I said before, we will soon know about it. The rest you know: Annas ordered them to lead Jesus into his son-in-law's presence and we left the house."

Shortly before six o'clock in the morning, the platoon that escorted Jesus stopped in front of a very rustic house located a small distance from the Temple's immense rectangle. Specifically, it was in the southwest corner of an a small area landscaped with gardens and perfectly isolated from the city's lower district by the Robinson and Wilson arches to the north and south and the Temple's small and large south walls to the east and west respectively.

Flocks of early rising swallows fluttered and frolicked between the second floor eaves of this mansion, which was more than fifty meters long by about 34 or 35 meters wide. The trills of these black immigrants and the deafening rhythmic sound of grinding grain, which emanated

from all of the houses in Jerusalem, were the last agreeable sounds we heard before entering this “den.”

During this new transfer of Jesus, the possibility of us being lead into the Sanhedrin’s headquarters inside the sanctuary made me tremble. Neither the Roman mercenary who kept the Teacher in his custody nor I would have had access to this place. Appropriately, I had learned from the text of the historian Flavius Josephus, that a few months prior to the beginning of the year 30, the priestly class had “hollowed out” the famous “Hall of Hewn Stone” which was located in one of the southwest corners of the Priest’s Courtyard. They also relocated the meeting room for the Sanhedrin to this building, which had thick, barely planed, grey walls¹.

The trial that Caiaphas had planned was not very orthodox, as we shall see, and although the Israeli supreme council continued to occasionally meet in the sanctuary, this time to my great satisfaction, the high priest and his supporters had preferred to settle the affair in the new headquarters which were much more discrete than the Hall of Hewn Stones. The Levites went through a narrow dark passage that led to a small central courtyard of the Bouleyterion or the Sanhedrin’s general headquarters. Without losing any time, we went from there into a square room that was quite spacious with a high ceiling—which judging from the route we had taken was situated in the west wing of the building.

The light, which entered through the long narrow windows, was so dim that they were forced to keep oil lanterns constantly burning. Just as I had feared, as soon as I merely stepped into the room where the celebrated trial against the Galilean was to be held, one of the high priest’s servants stood in my way, demanding me to identify myself. These were very tense seconds. In my capacity as a simple Greek merchant, I had no reason to attend the assembly. From these Hebrews’ perspective, my presence was not justifiable from any point of view. And when I thought all was lost, the soldier who was still at my side cut the suspense with an opportune response.

“Stop! This man comes with me and like me represents the governor.”

This lie, which was a consequence of the silver denarii I had given to Arsenius legate’s sub officer, was decisive. Without further explanation, we were conducted into the central chamber. Wooden benches shaped in a continuous semicircle or crescent occupied slightly more than half (an area of approximately ten meters square) of the room. The common seats were ornately and handsomely carved and high backed but without arms. They were arranged on a wooden platform forty centimeters high so their occupants could dominate the room.

Facing these seats and enclosed by the semi-circle I saw three rows of which were also wooden; however these faced the seats that were arranged in a semicircle and were set on the flag stoned floor at a much lower level. When we entered, the seats arranged in a semicircle were already filled by a total of twenty-three priests. Another six or seven had been accommodated in the first three rows of the benches. The other rows were empty. (Later when I compared the information supplied by the *cradle*’s main computer, I came to the conclusion that the half dozen Sadducees and Pharisees who sat outside the semi-circle had done so simply because that was the

¹ Both Josephus work, *The Jewish Wars* (V:4,2 and VI: 6, 3), and the *Mishnah* viz. *Middot* (V.5), *Sanhedrin* (XI.2) and *Tamid* (II.5), among other documents, state very accurately that the Sanhedrin was moved to the “stone hewn” hall into a kind of “bazaar” that was attached to the Temple’s west side forty years before the Temple was destroyed. There are also glimpses of it in Acts (23:10) [Major’s note].

place for the Lesser Sanhedrin¹, which were solely formed by twenty-three exclusive members. Caiaphas had succeeded in gathering about thirty of the “peers.” Consequently they could not all take a seat on the official tribunal.)

There were two legal scribes sitting at the edge of the wooden platform against each of the two ends of the semicircle. They were wearing traditional white linen tunics with sashes that held small wooden boxes from which they began to extract their writing implements: reed pens, two miniature bottles of ink, and several rolls of leather. To tell the truth, those two scribes were the only form of legal propriety in this entire simulacrum of a trial. (According to the *Mishnah*, one was responsible for recording the arguments in favor of absolution of the detained or detainees and the other wrote the proposed condemnations.)

Jesus, who was always accompanied by the legionnaire controlling the rope, which was tied to his wrists, was forced to sit at the foot of the decking facing the judges with his back to the three rows of benches. John and I, along with the other Levites and the Sanhedrin’s domestic staff, took positions behind these rows of seats to the left of the Teacher. I discovered a group of Hebrews at the back of the room, behind a door which stood ajar. Judging from their clothes, they were neither priests, nor members of the Sanhedrin. (The mystery was soon solved.)

From the beginning, my attention was called to a person who sat in the center of the tribunal. He must have been around fifty years old. He was not very tall and his body was exceedingly fat all over. His obesity was especially pronounced in his face which was round and congested with a huge double chin on which rested a greying beard. He did not wear a turban so his head, which was topped by glossy black hair cut in a short “Julius” style, shone out among his companions on the pews.

His great humanity was notably multiplied by his garments which were very different from those of the rest of the judges. He was wearing a pair of tawny colored silk pants with a matching tunic. His chest was encircled by five bands or *hazalejas* each one was a single color: gold, crimson, scarlet, violet, and fawn. This individual was Joseph ben Caiaphas who had been high priest since the year 18 by the appointment of Valerius Gratus who was the Roman governor prior to Pilate.

The 22 members of the Sanhedrin, who sat to the left and right of Annas’ son-in-law, all wore loose multi-colored robes. In a low voice, John pointed out the most poisonous intriguers: Shemesh, Dothaim, Levi, Gamaliel, Yair, Naphtali, and a certain Alexander. They were mostly Sadducees. Nearly all of these men, whose ages varied around sixty years old, wore an expression of perplexity.

The Nazarene’s calm and majestic bearing must have made this profound impression. From the instant Jesus was placed front of them, the whispering had not ceased. Yet Caiaphas appeared to be in a hurry. At his command, some of the police invited the group of Jews waiting in the next room to enter the assembly. First to John’s amazement, then to his indignation these

¹ *Santa Claus* provided the following information about the composition of the Sanhedrin’s council at that time. There was a higher institution or Greater Sanhedrin, which was composed of 72 members, and a Lesser Sanhedrin with 23. Both tribunals had jurisdiction over criminal cases. The two most prominent members of the Greater Sanhedrin were the *nasi* or the president and the *av beit din* or “father of the tribunal” both of which seemed to be purely honorific titles. The three rows of the Lesser Sanhedrin were intended for the sages’ disciples. Given the character of this “trial” and the irregular hour, it was logical that the judges’ “pupils” were not present [Major’s note].

“witnesses” began testifying against the Galilean's teachings and person. Their attacks were so exaggerated that they were disorganized.

They focused primarily on numerous violations of the Sabbath and the Mosaic laws, which they argued, Jesus had committed with his “group of raggedy Galileans.” These perjurers, which to all lights were hastily purchased by the Sanhedrin, contradicted themselves incessantly thus turning the session into a farce. The parade of false testimony went to such a lamentable extreme that some of the judges lowered their heads in embarrassment, shifting in their seats nervously and violently.

On this occasion, the Teacher even raised his face, yet it remained impassive as he towered above his accusers not only due to his size, but above all for his majestic deportment. This serene disposition, without the faintest shade of pride or conceit, further exasperated the Caiaphas and his accomplices. As they did not understand how a man could keep such a calm demeanor when everything pointed to a likely death sentence.

“This profaner of the Sabbath is a recidivist,” declared one of the witnesses. “It has already been recorded that he has been reprimanded by the priests for several infractions. At the very least this offense is worthy of execution.”

(In agreement with the chapter of the *Mishnah* entitled *Sanhedrin-Makkot*, one who commits a premeditated and recurring profanation of the Sabbath should be stoned to death.) Another false witness put in a word as he pointed to the Galilean. He reminded the room of the multiplication of the fish and loaves of bread.

“According to our laws, this man is a magician who deceives the people with his acts. Akiva said in the name of Joshua, ‘If two people put their cucumbers together in the service of magic, the one who performs the act is guilty and the one who is only deceived by the vision is not guilty.’ Hence many people can see how this envoy is sent from the Prince of the Demons to carry out his deeds and his disciples immediately second him...”

A murmur of approval spread among the judges. Yet the Teacher was silent.

“In respect to Leviticus, the defendant became unclean from his contact with cadavers,” argued another one of the Hebrews. “And if he were not guilty enough, he dared to violate the sacred belief in the resurrection of the dead by taking Lazarus out of his tomb.”

Some of the Sadducees, whose philosophy flatly rejected the resurrection of the dead, shook their heads, openly smiling. Caiaphas, who belonged to this faction, passed over the Sadducees’ impertinence. Now was not the time to enter into polemics with the Pharisees who were scowling with obvious disgust at the manifest irony and silence of the rest of the tribunal.

The momentary tension between the judges dissipated when the witness diverted his accusation to the “magical act” which had raised Lazarus from his tomb in less time than it took to blow a couch. (This reference made me reckon that each one of the soundings of the horns by the Levites at the Temple never extended beyond fifteen seconds. However, during Lazarus’ resurrection, twelve to fifteen seconds could have passed from the time Jesus called out to him until the time Lazarus came back to life.)

This indictment, like nearly all of the others was so puerile and baseless that the high priest, who was growing increasingly uncomfortable, pressed for the next witness to proceed. Still

the subsequent allegations were no more brilliant ... Several of the Jews accompanied their words with great fanfare as they reminded the tribunal of Jesus' other "crimes."

"He didn't eat the required Passover lamb."

That information could only have been supplied by Judas Iscariot who had arrived at the Sanhedrin's building long before us. He stood behind the group of witnesses, but never testified. (These people's rules prohibited a traitor from publically addressing the council.) In fact, Mosaic Law established that all Israelites were required to eat lamb or a kid goat during the observance of Passover. Only years later, after the destruction of the Temple, did the *Mishnah* in Chapter IV (*Pesahim*¹) relax the rules by saying, 'in places where it is not customary to eat meat, it does not have to be consumed.'

One of the last accusers arrived to loop the loop in this string of inconsistencies and absurdities. He alluded to the Judaic laws and managed to accuse the Nazarene of "frustrated homicide." His flimsy, ridiculous argument was based on another rule, which decreed the guilt of someone who hit his or her neighbor with a stone in a manner that caused death. This coached witness was referring to the popular account where an adulteress was saved from stoning when Jesus addressed the mob and invited the 'person who was free from sin to throw the first stone.' For this twisted Hebrew, that gesture constituted a crime since it incited murder.

The grotesque scene was somewhat sedate, when the twenty-three judges and the rest of the members of the Sanhedrin suddenly stood up. There was a heavy silence in the chamber and one of the Sadducees who sat to the right of Caiaphas' gave up his place to a small stooped individual who had just burst into the room.

"It's Annas," John whispered to me.

During my stay at the former high priest's palace, I did not have the opportunity to meet him. Now as I watched two servants help him climb the platform, I felt disappointed. Caiaphas' powerful father-in-law and the patriarch of an influential family of priests was actually a frail, elderly man who was very close to seventy years old and suffering from the pain of an advanced case of Parkinson's disease. As a sage or president of the chamber of elders, he occupied the seat to the right of the high priest appointed for that year. The remainder of the judges immediately sat down again.

With a contemptuous motion of his plump hands, Caiaphas indicated for the witnesses to proceed. In spite of what was most likely cerebral sclerosis, Annas or Ananus as Josephus called him—still had huge quick eyes like a nocturnal bird of prey. No sooner was he seated, than his eyes roved over the room to settle on the Teacher. The trembling of his hands increased. Jesus held his gaze, but Annas who was hesitant, tried to hide his hands, which were as dry and yellow as parchment, under his purple robe. Once he shifted his attention to the current inquisitor, he seemed to forget about the Galilean.

"This man," the witness began to proclaim, "asserts that the Temple will be destroyed in three days and rebuilt in one, but without the help of human hands."

¹ After the Temple was destroyed, some people did not eat roasted meat to avoid its resemblance to the Passover sacrifice, which was banned after the said destruction [Major's note].

In the end, the Temple authorities found the condemning argument sufficiently solid. Of course, that was not what Jesus said. Moreover, neither this witness nor the next one's testimony correlated with what his colleague said. Neither of them alluded to the decisive gesture the Rabbi made with his hand while he uttered these prophetic words, in which he pointed his finger at his own body. If my memory is not bad, this was the only testimony in which two individuals were able to reach an agreement. Prior to the conclusion of the witnesses' testimony, the clamor from the archons or chief priests disrupted the order in the room with exaggerated displays of dissatisfaction and incredulity.

Caiaphas raised his arms in a request for calm, while the outline of a cynical smile appeared on his face. Gradually silence was restored. At that moment, Annas made a sign to his son-in-law. He leaned over and the former high priest spoke into his ear. Once he finished, both of them glared at Jesus. He was still unperturbed. None of the allegations had managed to change his mood.

"You aren't going to reply to any of the accusations?" Caiaphas abruptly shouted in a disagreeable shrill voice.

The judges, witnesses, Levites, and the rest of the attendees, including Judas waited for the Galilean's answer. It was useless. The Teacher looked at Caiaphas and did not unglue his lips. The accused man's silence united with his considerable composure to make Caiaphas redden. His eyelids began to open and close rhythmically in a nervous tic. It is very possible the hatred the Hebrew felt for Jesus of Nazareth in those minutes reached an extreme peak. I am almost certain what truly fed the high priest's quest for vengeance, beyond Christ's teachings and miracles, was his constant self-assurance. If Jesus had humbled himself or adopted a conciliatory posture, perhaps the simulation of a trial would not have had drawn such painful consequences for Rabbi of Galilee.

When everything seemed to indicate that Caiaphas was on the verge of exploding, Annas stood up. He removed a roll of parchment from inside his right sleeve. As he unrolled it, he made an announcement to the tribunal.

"The Galilean's threat to destroy the Temple was a more than sufficient reason to consider the following charges..."

In a tight wavering voice, with his eyes almost stuck to the document, he read the charges that had obviously been written down before the Sanhedrin's session.

"The defendant dangerously deceives the populace with his teachings...The defendant is a revolutionary fanatic who promotes violence against the holy Temple, even to its destruction. The defendant teaches and practices magic and astrology¹. The proof, in the form of his promise to build a new sanctuary in three days without using his hands, is conclusive."

John's stupefaction made me see what was as clear as light: the written document was similar to the accusations that had been given. There was a mutual agreement between them and the false witnesses. But the council's indignities had not even started. Annas rolled up the parchment, put it away, and stood next to the accused. Yet Jesus did not move a single muscle.

¹ The practice of astrology was severely punished. Rops claims this was a "baleful science that generates all sorts of evil" [J.J. Benitez's note].

The elder was visibly upset; he let himself fall back into the pew and a dense threatening silence inundated the chamber again.

In a fit of ire, Caiaphas sprang out of his seat and arrived in front of the Teacher.

“In the name of the living god, blessed be, I order you to tell me if you are the savior and the Son of God, blessed be his name!” he yelled as he pointed a menacing finger at Jesus.

This time Jesus lowered his eyes to the stunned, choleric high priest and allowed him to hear his powerful voice.

“I am he...and soon I will return to my place beside my father. Shortly, the Son of Man will wear the power and will reign again over the heavenly host.”

The Nazarene’s emphatic words echoed through the room like a blow from a sledgehammer. Caiaphas retreated two steps. His mouth was open and trembling, his face and neck flushed, his eyes appeared as though they were injected with blood. Without moving his eyes from Jesus, he reached for the five *hazalejas* encircling his chest and yanked the cords that held them to his back¹ until the pins flew off. The high priest’s sacred ornaments fell on the floor with an almost imperceptible click as the ivory needles crashed against the tiled surface. Caiaphas was beside himself.

“Why do we need witnesses?” he exclaimed in a voice broken by an involuntary “rain” of saliva whose small drops sprayed through the air. “Now we have heard this man’s blasphemy! What do you think? How must we proceed with this violator?”

Thirty some Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes stood as one man and said in a vociferous chorus, “He deserves to die! Crucifixion! Crucifixion!”

The accelerated pulsing of the arteries in Caiaphas’ neck clearly indicated his body was experiencing a major adrenaline rush. And with same fury with which he had shamelessly torn with his garment, he faced the Teacher again and launched a fierce backhand slap across Jesus’ left cheek. The seals on the high priest’s left hand (I managed to identify a stone setting made from jasper, sardonyx, and carnelian) cut Jesus’ cheekbone and two tiny rivulets of blood opened a path through his beard.

Nonetheless, not a single complaint escaped from the Galilean. He lowered his eyes and did not raise them again as the Temple police led him to the room where I had seen the witnesses assembled. Annas’ son-in-law retired from his place while the chorus of judges persisted.

“Kill him! Kill him!” the shouted.

John clung to my arm, biting the sleeve of his robe in an attack of impotent desperation. But no one, not even the Roman soldier, lifted a single finger in Jesus’ defense. The high priest’s father-in-law who was the only one still seated in silence, asked for calm. When the last Sanhedrin obeyed Annas’ command, he spoke to the agitated council, suggesting that they search for new charges, especially those that would compromise the Nazarene before the Roman

¹ At that time, neither men nor women used buttons. They were unknown in Israel. Instead, they used cords that were secured by a special large-eyed needle. These were inserted into the fabric so that the cord passed behind the point and head [Major’s note].

authority. With a level of intelligence subtler than that expressed by the rest of the attendees, the veteran former high priest made them understand that the present allegations would not satisfy Pontius Pilate.

Even so, the priests who were led by Caiaphas roundly opposed him. For a long while, the scribes, Pharisees, and Temple leaders had a heated discussion in which they trampled on each other's words. From this bitter polemic, I deduced that the chief priests did not wish to delay the trial for two basic reasons, which Caiaphas had already demonstrated. First, it was the day of "preparation" for Passover therefore, according to the law, all work must be concluded before noon. Secondly, there was a general fear of the possibility that the governor would leave Jerusalem and return to his base at Caesarea. This latter prospect weighed in much more than the first. If Pontius left the Holy City, the results of the Sanhedrin's maneuvers would be sterile.

Annas could not control the situation. The judges imitated the high priest by rising and leaving the room. Yet before they did this, they passed in front of the Teacher one by one and spit in his face. If I do not recall incorrectly, there were thirty sets of spittle. Better said, it was phlegm and saliva perhaps in equal parts. When the Teacher went by my side on his way to the room where even more barbaric and degrading affronts would take place on this day, the disciple turned his head as the repugnant spit that nearly hid the docile Jesus' face and beard affected him. John was seized by a series of strong heaves and ended up vomiting into one of the corners of the chamber.

Thus, in the midst of a great confusion, the first part of the "trial" was concluded. It was half past six in the morning. At the height of the Jewish trial, Jesus of Nazareth would actually be a new grotesque caricature of what would have occurred in an objective manner. The Hebrew rules—which were crumbling at the end of the Rabbi from Galilee's double appearance before a judge and the irregular Sanhedrin's council—were very strict in regard to all causes "of blood."

The fourth order (Chapter V) of the *Mishnah*, establishes with exceptional rigor and precision, that "if the accused is found innocent, the case is dismissed." However, in this case, the opposite occurred: the judges postponed the sentencing until the next day. Well good, this important judicial prescription was not taken into account by the high priests thirty followers, furthermore it was vilely manipulated.

By mutual agreement, Caiaphas and his partisans left the courtroom, thereby reducing the tribunal's required 24 hour period for deliberation and abstention from issuing a preliminary sentence to barely thirty minutes. This was a half an hour, which in my opinion, contained the highest degree of savagery a group of humans could achieve.

It is likely that due to ignorance or out of respect, the gospels do not tell us practically anything about what the Teacher endured at that time and in that place. My personal inclination is toward to the first reason: the lack of information. As I will soon relate in detail, John could not be present for that hair-raising half hour. The holy writings do make some allusions—which are always very superficial and do not enter into the particulars about a slap, some spitting, and the blows dealt by the Sanhedrin's servants...

I honestly believe that perhaps in an urge not to mortify their readers with Christ's sufferings, the evangelists did meager service to the truth by not exposing the Nazarene's bleak predicament in minute detail. If one knew exactly what happened that morning in one of the Sanhedrin's chambers, maybe one could attain a sense of the bitterest and most humiliating moment of the entire Passion. I suppose it was much more so, than the flagellation or the

terrifying scene of the nailing...I understand for any normal person—and logically a lot more if this man is the very Divine—the outrages and attacks to one's dignity can turn out to be more painful than the physical beatings and torture. Moreover, this occurred while the judges were deliberating in the main building's garden.

Without hesitating for an instant, I followed the soldier who had custody of Jesus. Meanwhile John, who was so affected that repulsive dishonor of his Teacher's person that he went outdoors to breathe some pure air and recuperate both physically and emotionally. But in a few minutes, I saw myself enter the room where the Levites had led Jesus.

We found ourselves in a tiny room that was completely empty, devoid of furniture and without ventilation. Two of the Sanhedrin's staff held torches, which together with the three small oil lamps that hung from the brick walls, illuminated the rectangular cell with a ghostly reddish light. The Nazarene was placed in the center of the humid, foul smelling room while the police and the Temple servants—who numbered about a dozen, more or less—took positions either leaning against the wall or sitting on the hard floor.

As I noted the silence and total indifference of these individuals, my initial impression was they were relatively calm. It was obvious Caiaphas' mercenaries had received directions to guard the defendant and wait for the proceedings to resume. However, when scarcely a couple of minutes had passed, one of the Levites who had attended the council's session began to lurk in the doorway and beckon to one of the men who carried a torch.

After whispering to him briefly, the newcomer disappeared and the torchbearer took a few steps toward his companions who were in the room, transmitting the instructions which had undoubtedly been received from the police. The servants and the Levites formed a circle and held a discussion in a low voice as they continued to glance at the prisoner. They were weaving something...

During these critical moments, Jesus raised his head as he looked around. Finally, his eyes stopped on John who was still very close to the door. Without pronouncing a single word, he made a motion with his head ordering John to leave the room. The signal was unequivocal, but the disciple was doubtful, so he responded with a negative. For the second and last time, the Teacher jerked his head to the right indicating the door. The Nazarene's eyes held such intensity and certainty that in the end, John conceded and left the scene.

When the infantryman who also witnessed the accused's silent order, gave me a questioning look I shrugged my shoulders. At that time, I did not comprehend why Jesus of Nazareth had forced his inseparable friend to abandon us. Sadly, there would be no delay in ascertaining why. Once John had gone, the Teacher merely watched me for a few seconds. Through his eyes that were half-closed because of the saliva, which had already dried, I detected a mix of resignation and infinite sadness. Then he lowered his head again, sinking into his thoughts.

This tense calm soon exploded. The group of mercenaries surrounded the Teacher. Men with axes stood on each side of Jesus and without warning the servant who had received the mysterious instructions, tore off the Teacher's mantle and threw it to the other end of the room. He proceeded by placing four fingers on the Rabbi's chest, raising his eyes, and commencing an interrogation.

“Tell us Prince of Beelzebub, what are the names of your accomplices?”

However, Jesus did not even raise his face. All at once I started to sense what the orders were that the police and the Sanhedrin's servants had just received. If I recall correctly, Annas has posed the same question. It was most likely that the council of Sadducees and scribes had adjourned the trial and decreed for the Teacher's guards to make use of this interval to continue the interrogation and extract information from the imposter.

"We know about Judas," the lackey added with a smile that made me fear for the worse, "and Simon the Zealot and John Zebedee. But who are the rest? Answer!"

The Galilean did not blink. His distant expression faced the grey flagstones on the floor.

"Since you refuse to respond." The servant turned his back to Jesus and took a short step away. He instantly whirled around and slapped Jesus with his left hand. The blow was very hard and unexpected. The Rabbi's entire body reeled. The remains of the spit on his right cheek stuck to the palm of the bailiff's hand. With a grimace of disgust, he shook his fingers repeatedly as he tried to free himself from the nastiness. Eventually, he wiped his hand on the Nazarene's mantle.

When the soldier tried to cut the sudden savage attack short, one of the Temple's guards took him by the shoulder, guided him away from the Rabbi, and gave him a small leather purse. He also whispered that he must divide the money with me and we should not interfere. The bribe turned the mercenary into a deaf mute; he moved into one of the corners of the room and stayed there. His satisfaction increased when I refused to accept my share.

Despite the resentment which started to burn my insides, I could not do anything but observe and try not to alter events just as the Trojan Horse Project's guidelines dictated. From that moment, a rain of punches and slaps began to fall on the Teacher's body. Intermittantly, between blows, some of the Levites questioned him again...

"Answer! How many are there? What are the names of your followers? Who has taken over the command?"

Nevertheless Jesus, whose lips were broken from the impact, did not yield. Some of the punches smashed against his eyes, producing a slow but alarming swelling. In the midst of this iniquity, I marveled anew at the Galilean's serenity and physical fortitude. Most of the blows that were coldly aimed at his most vulnerable and delicate spots such as his eyes, lips, ears, kidneys and stomach would have knocked out a normal man. Although the Nazarene staggered on various occasions, a single lament did not escape and he always maintained his equilibrium.

The defendant's hermetic silence stoked the Levites fury, so they intensified their aggression. Sweaty, panting, racked by paroxysms, these lunatics were not satisfied with the violent beating they were inflicting. They went in search of a pitcher of water in order to make Jesus submit to the most agonizing torture invented by man.

One of the mercenaries stood behind the Galilean and violently pulled his hair. The well-built body automatically bowed backwards. The second bailiff proceeded to pry open Jesus' lips, while the third, who held the jug, began to pour the water into the Nazarene's mouth. The liquid bubbled into his mouth for several interminable seconds until the Rabbi was attacked by an intense coughing fit that brought the torture to a full stop.

These human beasts had unwittingly eased the prisoner's punished body—and in what way! (As a result, of the stress he had endured in the garden at Gethsemane, the Teacher from Galilee had started to experience a serious and significant dehydration process that would intensify appreciably after the beating.) The servant who held the clay jug set it aside, meanwhile the Levite continued yanking the captive's hair as another bailiff raised his left leg and launched a kick into the prisoner's defenseless lower belly. It was one of the few times I heard a groan from Jesus' mouth.

The pain must have been extremely excruciating since, despite the fact that the Galilean's trunk arched back, his head straightened in a reflexive motion at the same time that his knees buckled. In a tenth of a second, Christ fell to the floor, striking his face on the flagstones.

"Stupid!" the soldier interjected as he went to aid the prisoner's motionless body. "Do you intend to finish him off?"

The police officer who had been jerking the Galilean's hair, released the lock of hair that was left in his fingers, snatched the pitcher of water from his crony, and dumped part of its contents on the Nazarene's nape. Since Jesus had fallen on his face, I honestly could not confirm if—as I feared—he had indeed lost consciousness. His hands were still tied behind his back, so the Levites and servants were the ones who, with the assistance of the Roman sentinel, helped Jesus to stand.

When I finally managed to see his face, a shiver ran through my belly. Jesus was extremely pale. There was an open gash on one of his eyebrows—the left—possibly caused by his impact with the floor. Although some bruising appeared on his nose, he did not seem seriously hurt by the fall. This made me think the Teacher was still conscious the instant he crashed onto the pavement. Perhaps he dampened the harrowing impact by turning his head.

Even so, the blood had started to flow in abundance on the left side of his face. Instinctively, the Nazarene began to inhale deeply. He was recovering little by little, however the expression on his face did not resemble the same serene, majestic one it had when he entered the Sanhedrin's headquarters. The blood commenced dripping from his beard staining his mantle and part of his tunic.

Now somewhat calmer, Caiaphas' minions gathered into one of the corners of the room where they exchanged impressions. Soon the man who had removed Jesus' loose-fitting outer robe, retrieved it from the floor and threw it over the Rabbi's head. Once he was covered, another one of the Levites approached Jesus.

"Prophesize, liberator! Can you tell us who hit you?" He yelled between raucous laughter.

Then he brandished a cudgel about four centimeters in diameter in his left hand and gave the silent Teacher a sharp frightful whack in the face. The Rabbi lurched backwards from the hit, yet before he could topple over another servant grabbed him from behind and held him up. The laughter spread rapidly as one member of the pack after another participated in this despicable

game¹. The slapping and the clubbing lasted for ten minutes. With each blow, the aggressors intoned the same cynical question.

“Prophesize! Who hit you? Prophesize, you bastard!”²

Around about seven o’clock, in the morning when the Nazarene was sagged against one of the walls apparently at the point of fainting, several Levites entered the room directing their colleagues to bring the detainee before the council. As soon as these barbarians took the mantle off the Teacher’s head, my blood froze in my veins. If I had not known beforehand that this was Jesus, I believe I would not have recognized him.

The combination of the fall on his right cheekbone and part of his nose (despite the cushioning effect of the tissue) and the cudgeling (I presume it was the first blow) produced a swelling in both areas. Moreover, the clubbing or perhaps the other punches had caused an extraordinary nosebleed. The streams of blood that had flowed from both nostrils, over his lips, then soaked his mustache and beard were already dry. The bruises on his eyes were so severe that the Rabbi could barely open them.

The sight of his broken, inflamed face with its left side covered in blood, left the Sanhedrin’s servants and hired assassins speechless. Evidently the beating had been brutal. To my surprise, some nervous Levites started to discuss the need to clean and tidy up the Teacher’s face. This was not motivated by compassion, but from the fear of possible reprisals or recriminations from the judges and perchance the Nazarene’s followers. In the end one of the servants poured water from the jug to soak one end of the robe or mantle they had thrown over Jesus.

With an initiative I could never satisfactorily explain to myself, I approached the police officer, identified myself as a doctor, and asked him to allow me to wash the Galilean’s face and, in passing, I said I could examine him for possible fractures. The police agreed with a measure of relief, but they warned me to be quick with the “repairs” since the council was waiting.

Obviously, during their planning sessions the Trojan Horse team had not foreseen the possibility that I would “repair” Jesus of Nazareth nor the injuries that he would suffer. As I mentioned before this was strictly prohibited. Seeing that the Levites were preparing to clean the prisoner’s crushed face, I considered this a unique opportunity for me to perform a close examination of his exterior and the most serious visible damage. In spite of this justification, there was also “something” inside me which impelled me to make such a decision...

So I took a section of the coarse mantle with all of the gentleness I was capable of and began to clean away the clumps of blood that stuck to his left cheekbone and cheek. As much blood had come from a gash above his left eyebrow as from his nose. It was spectacular. Yet I still had the impression that the blood loss was not significant. Judging from the thin trickles, clots, and the blood accumulated on his beard, mantle, and tunic, I think it did not amount to more

¹ Ancient Greek texts describe a game called *muinda*, which involved covering one of the players’ eyes with a piece of fabric or his or her own hand. This person must guess the object or the person he or she is presented with only from touch. If he or she guesses correctly, the one who lost takes his or her place.

² Although there are different definitions of a “bastard”, it was generally a child born from adultery. They were not admitted into the assembly of Israel nor were their descendants ‘until the tenth generation.’ They could not form a marriage contract with any legitimate member of the Jewish community. The earnest discussion included whether the families of bastards could participate in the final liberation of Israel. This was considered to be one of the worst insults. A person who used it could be sentenced to 39 lashes [Major’s note].

than 200 to 300 cubic centimeters. I also deduced that the ability of Christ's blood to coagulate was normal. In addition to the cut above his eyebrow, there were splits in his lips. The streams that originated from his nostrils had coagulated very quickly.

After I had carefully cleaned half of his face, I discarded the mantle and before Caiaphas' servants could react, I slipped my fingers into the hole the bandit has made in my cloak the previous night—on Thursday—when he attempted to assault me, and with two strong tugs I tore off a small piece of my tunic. I inserted it into the mouth of the jug of water and wet it as much as possible. I immediately returned to the wall that Jesus was leaning against and passed the soft bone-colored linen over his disfigured nose, lips, eyebrows, and eyelids¹.

When I touched the swelling on his right cheek, I inferred that the blows from the baton had affected a wide area from his malar bone to his right eye. If this hematoma continued swelling, it was probable that the Nazarene would experience serious difficulties keeping that eye open. As for his nose, the logical impossibility of taking x-rays left me doubtful about whether the impact had fractured his nose or the little bones inside it. All doctors know these two bones are very fragile and can easily collapse from a single punch. Once the examination had concluded, it was my opinion that the thirteen bones in Jesus' face seemed to be intact.

Yet my significant uncertainty about his nostrils persisted. Given the strength of the blow, it was feasible that they had been damaged. (In accordance to the famous prophecy, I assumed that 'none of the bones in the Messiah's body would be broken' only referred to the "large bones.") With due reservation, this special detail inclined me to believe from the onset that the tiny nasal bones had collapsed.

In the course of the second washing, when I touched the inflamed mass of muscles on his nose (essentially the pyramidal and transverse ones) in order to palpitate the nasal cartilage, the Rabbi backed away slightly. Despite my extreme gentleness, simply grazing the tissue on the point of his nose multiplied his pain. At that moment, the silent giant half-opened his eyes and gazed at me. I tried to smile and I think I succeeded. It was all I could give him. Jesus caught my poor but sincere token of friendship and his lips quivered. Suddenly, to my great distress, a tear slipped from his left eye. This made me sink even further into a feeling of impotence...

The mercenary, who had warned the tyrants, came to look in the doorway again. With a gesture of impatience, he made his way to the defendant, grabbed him by the arm and pushed him

¹ Thanks to this gesture, the Trojan Horse Project obtained an invaluable blood sample from Jesus of Nazareth. Although we analyzed the blood clot that was attached to the swatch of my tunic, we could not perform the tests with the recommended speed to determine some values. However, we were able to determine that the volume of erythrocytes per cubic centimeter at that time (7 am) was approximately 4.9 million, which is somewhat lower than normal. Perhaps this was because the effects of the blood loss were beginning to register. I also observed some leukocytes, though there were very few. A comparative cross analysis established the quantity of these cells was 7,000 per cubic milliliter, and that the types of cells examined (neutrophil, eosinophil, basophil, lymphocyte, monocyte) corresponded to the ones which normally exist in a healthy individual. Even though the first analysis was done before 36 hours had elapsed, it was not possible to detect platelets. All of these had disappeared. We did find the remains of thrombin and some byproducts of degraded fibrin. In one of the congealed lumps that was kept slightly damper than the rest, it was possible to detect various plasma proteins (mainly albumin and globulin) as well as traces of glucose, vitamins, hormones, and assorted amino acids. We could not find any signs of cholesterol. Concerning coagulation, a personal inspection of his injuries established that his coagulation was normal. This deduction was supported by a blood plasma protein analysis that indicated the presence of fibrinogen, which would have degraded after its conversion into fibrin [Major's note].

towards the exit. This time the Teacher re-entered the Sanhedrin's chamber with halting steps. The pain, fatigue, and lack of sleep were beginning to form cracks in his organism. I was the last one to leave that tragic place. I intentionally waited until the last of the Levites had departed so I could bend down and pick up the lock of hair the police officer had inadvertently pulled out of Jesus' skull. I hid it in my bag next to the bloody piece of fabric I had ripped from my tunic and rushed to rejoin the Sanhedrin's council.

The judges occupied the same places and the Nazarene, escorted by the Roman soldier and two other servants who tried to keep him upright, was to stand in the front of the semicircle. Even with the hurried cleaning, his face appeared so dreadful that the thirty judges could not repress their surprise. For some minutes, they exchanged a myriad of sarcastic glances as they imagined the torture the imposter had been subjected to and recognized the sudden change in his serene, majestic demeanor.

John joined me and was unable to say a single word. His frightened eyes examined and re-examined the Teacher's countenance unable to believe that this was unfortunately only the beginning of the end. Once the judicial scribes returned to their positions, Annas began to speak and point to the parchment that his son-in-law held, thus reiterating the idea he had introduced in the first part of the session. To the former high priest, the accusation of blasphemy lacked strength especially before the Roman governor. He insisted on the necessity to compile a series of allegations that would compromise the Rabbi from Galilee in regard to the type of justice Pilate represented.

On hearing Caiaphas' father-in-law, I imagined the scroll he alluded to contained the definitive sentence against Jesus, and unable to suppress my curiosity, I asked John what had happened during the judges' deliberation. The increasingly demoralized disciple did not even hear me. I had to shake him a little until he finally paid attention to my question. With teary eyes, he explained that during the improvised meeting between the Sadducees and Pharisees in the building's central courtyard, 'those unworthy priests only reached one agreement: to execute Jesus.' Although John had stayed very close to the judges, he had not managed to learn the text of the judgment that was written, after much debate, by Caiaphas himself.

For a moment I thought the high priest would read the charge or charges, but it was not so. Following numerous circumlocutions and digressions by the members of the council, three of the Pharisees rose from their seats and refused to continue to participate in this "trial." They did express their concord with giving the Rabbi the death sentence, however their traditional sense of "purity" with respect to its public manifestation, advised them not to take part in this flagrantly illegitimate trial. At least when the Nazarene appeared before Pontius he would know the charge.

Caiaphas was unmoved by this snub from the so-called "holy" or "separate" ones. After consulting with the rest of the tribunal, he decided to adjourn the hearing. Hence, at seven-thirty in the morning the Sadducees, scribes, and the few Pharisees who had remained loyal to Caiaphas, marched past Jesus of Nazareth's battered figure for the second time. The Teacher quickly followed in the judges' footsteps. The Galilean was kept heavily guarded for a few minutes in a garden in the interior courtyard of the Sanhedrin's building.

Caiaphas and his men continued their heated argument in one of the corners. They re-entered the chamber and, after a short while, came out into the main courtyard again. The high priest carried two voluminous scrolls in his left hand. I found this strange. Then Caiaphas stood before the servants and Levites and ordered them to increase the safeguards around the blasphemer, as they travelled to the Romans' general headquarters.

Annas and the majority of the judges took their leave of Caiaphas and went back into the room where the first part of the trial had been held. Judas Iscariot, who had not exchanged a single word with us, also joined that entourage. The acting high priest, half a dozen Sadducees, and the platoon surrounding the Teacher, set out into the streets of the upper district to the Fish Gate.

As they passed in front of the bazaars, people stood and reverently saluted the high priest. In my opinion, none of the astonished witnesses successfully recognized Jesus. The hematomas on his eyes, nose, and right cheekbone had disfigured his face making it nearly unrecognizable. As we marched at full speed to the fortress, I noticed the two scrolls Caiaphas was holding again. What could they contain? Were they the judgment that would be presented to Pontius Pilate? My mind revolved endlessly around the announcement before the tribunal, which promised a second part in the process.

If my information was correct, Jesus would never to set foot in the Sanhedrin again. Then, what would happen? If one examines the record number of irregularities that had been achieved in that sham of justice, what could one expect from the supposed second hearing? From my cursory study of that trial, the Sanhedrin violated on at least twelve of the basic Hebrew laws related to the process of capital punishment. Here are some of the most irritating ones:

1. First of all, according to the *Mishnah* (IV, Sanhedrin), a trial calling for capital punishment must open with a claim of the defendant's innocence, not his or her guilt.
2. A trial involving blood, which I presume is one in which involves a judgment about the defendant's life—must never be held all in one day and the sentence, if the accused is condemned, could never be announced on that same day. 'Therefore,' reads the Jewish law, 'do not have a blood trial on the eve of the Sabbath or on a holiday.'¹ Hence the "lesser Sanhedrin", who convened their meeting on Friday April 7, which was the eve of the Sabbath and of Passover, committed a double offense.
3. In capital matters, the trial must always be opened by one of the judges who sits next to the eldest 'so the judges with the less authority are not influenced by the elders.' (In the case against the Teacher, the false witnesses commenced the trial.)
4. Speaking of the false witnesses', this group had already invalidated any other similar views. The Jewish law was and is extremely strict on this account. 'Prior to starting the trial, the witnesses must be severely admonished so that when they enter the place,' instructs the *Mishnah*, 'they are instilled with fear which makes them speak not from mere supposition, by hearsay, by the deposition of another witness, the statement of another man worthy of faith whom they heard and not from a belief which in the end, will not be examined and analyzed in his deposition. They must know what to say as a witness in a blood trial since the defendant's blood and the blood of all his offspring will depend on the false testimony until the end of the world...' None of this occurred in the Sanhedrin's headquarters. Indeed, the bribed witnesses fell into continuous overwhelming contradictions. The same law makes it clear that those who bear false witness must be flogged or even sentenced to death. Therefore, it is obvious these individuals accepted such a risk because they had been guaranteed immunity and naturally, a substantial amount of money beforehand.
5. The Mosaic Law states, 'If the defendant has been found guilty, the sentencing must be postponed until the next day.' As I mentioned, none of this was obeyed. The high priests

¹ This is what the law says in the *Mishnah* (Chapter IV: 1) in the treatise "Sanhedrin" [Major's note].

- and the tribunal adjourned the session for a half an hour at best, then they returned to the chamber immediately. The law continues, ‘In the meantime, the judges must meet in pairs, eat very sparingly, refrain from drinking wine the entire day, and spend the night in discussion and deliberation. In the morning, they must wake up early and go to the tribunal.’
6. If after all of this, the prisoner is still considered guilty of a capital crime, the final judgment should be issued after a vote. ‘If twelve declare him innocent and twelve declare him guilty, then he is declared innocent. If twelve declare him guilty and eleven innocent, or eleven declare him innocent and the other eleven guilty, and one says, “I don’t know,” or if 22 declare him innocent or guilty and one says, “I don’t know,” then more judges must be added.’ How many can they add? ‘Always add two at a time until the total number of judges reaches 71.’ The tribunal presided over by Annas and Caiaphas did not hold any vote.
 7. The Hebrew law forbids the same person from being both judge and accuser. In our case, Caiaphas monopolized both roles.
 8. The law even proscribes how the sentence is to be announced: ‘inscribe (the sentence) and send messengers everywhere announcing ‘Mr. Such & Such, son of so and so, has been condemned to death by the tribunal.’ This was one of the reasons why the three Pharisees who were part of the council decided to withdraw. Furthermore, at the epitome of the judicial irregularities, not even the accused himself knew the final text of his death sentence. (As we will see much later, Jesus of Nazareth died without knowing his “official” crime...)
 9. This includes the reply the Teacher gave to Caiaphas when he sought to thwart the declaration to his assertion that he was the Messiah was grounds for blasphemy as stated in the law. According to the *Mishnah*, ‘blasphemy is not an offense as long as one does not explicitly mention The Name.’ As I recall, Jesus’ answer did not cite the “Name”, that is Yahweh, God, or The Divine. Jesus said, ‘I am ...and soon I will be next to the father. Soon the Son of Man will be wearing the power and reign again over the heavenly hosts.’ Where does the explicit “Name” of god appear in these sentences?
 10. And if that were the situation, the law specifies that after concluding the trial, they must not sentence one to death using circumlocution, but cast them to the public outside the courtroom into the public and ask the most dignified witness: Tell us, what exactly did you hear? He says it. Then the judges will jump to their feet and tear their vestments so they cannot be put back together again. The second witness will say, “I also heard, what he said” and the third will say, “I too, (heard) the same as him.” Did anything in the judgment against the Nazarene proceed like this? Not even Caiaphas truly tore his vestments...
 11. If the tribunal considered Jesus a false prophet—as was the case—the law did not authorize the trial, unless it consisted of the “great Sanhedrin” composed of 71 members. And of that, as I said, officially only 23 were present.
 12. Lastly, although the string of errors and irregularities in this case was very long, the judges did not honor the legal code, which designated Monday and Thursday as the official days for holding the tribunal’s various commissions and assemblies (this is written in the first chapter of the *Mishnah*’s third order).

During my training for this mission, when I had the opportunity to investigate numerous sources, I observed how, even today there is no agreement among exegetes, authors, and biblical scholars about who was responsible for the Nazarene’s trial and subsequent death sentence. For many of them (primarily Jewish authors), it was the Sanhedrin of that era who enjoyed the

prerogative of capital punishment. And they say, “If Jesus the Nazarene was executed in the Roman style, it is because the conflict was not with them.”¹

For others, the Israeli community’s supreme council—the Sanhedrin—could judge, but never implement and enforce the maximum penalty. Under this assumption, the priestly class did not have any further remedy other than going before Pontius Pilate so he could ratify the sentence.² I never could understand why this difference of opinion exists between exegetes and Catholic writers. The majority of them plainly agree upon how mysterious and difficult the process is of verifying what transpired during Jesus’ resurrection from a consistently historical and scientific perspective, and yet rivers of ink run in favor or against the Sanhedrin’s penal jurisdiction.

When they researched the truth of the matter deeply by verifying a multitude of historical references about the authority of Rome and its governors, I observe that considering the hatred Caiaphas and his followers felt for Jesus, it would have been easy to sentence him to capital punishment and execute him without anything else. The unquestionable fact of their visit to Antonia’s fortress and the general submission of the Jewish judgment to Pontius Pilate, screams an objective fact: it was definitely Rome that ultimately had the last word.

Many of those who defend the Roman’s culpability in regard to the execution of the Teacher from Galilee, pretend to see the instances of the deaths of Stephan (in 36 AD) and James (in 62 AD), who was one of Jesus of Nazareth’s brothers, as two critical demonstrations of the legal capacity of the Sanhedrin to issue and administer a maximum sentence. Understand, however, that they were both lapidations or stonings which were effectively carried out by the Sanhedrin in two separate periods in which the Roman province of Judea was temporarily without a governor.

In the year 36 AD, Vitellius sent Pilate to Rome to present a report to Emperor Tiberius. Since, according to the narration by Josephus Flavius in the *Antiquities of the Jews* (XX: 197, 55), in the year 62 AD the Roman governor Festus had just died and his replacement Albinus had still not arrived in Judea. Another contradiction exists. If the Sanhedrin had truly possessed the legal power to apply and enact the death penalty, why was Jesus not executed in the “Jewish manner”?

Once again, Jewish law is extremely conscientious on this subject. The *Mishnah* (IV:7) states, ‘The tribunal can inflict four types of death sentences: lapidation, burning, decapitation, and strangulation.’ In general, lapidation or stoning was the harshest. It was applied in the following situations, and I continue citing the Hebrew law, ‘for any man who had sexual relations with his mother or his father’s wife or a daughter or a son or an animal; a woman who brings an animal (in order to copulate with it), for the blasphemer, for idolatry, for offering one’s children to Molech (an idol), for necromancy, fortune telling, profaning the Sabbath, for cursing one’s father or mother, for copulating with a bride who is already promised in marriage, for proselytizing on behalf of an idol, for converting an entire town to idolatry, for sorcery, and for a stubborn, rebellious child.’

¹ This is the way the following authors thought and wrote: S. Zeitlin, *The Crucifixion of Jesus Re-examined*; H. Mantel, *Studies in the Story of the Sanhedrin*; P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*; J. Carmichael, *The Death of Jesus*, as well as D. Flusser, J. Isaac, H. Cohen, W.R. Wilson, Catchpole, and a long etcetera [Major’s note].

² Among the advocates of the second hypothesis are, for example : Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus*; Jeremiah E. Lonse, *Sanhedrin*; Strack-Billerbeck and Mommsen, *Roman Criminal Law*; Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*; A. Strobel, *The Moment of Truth*; E. Schurer, etcetera [Major’s note].

As for “burning”, which I had the opportunity to witness during my second “grand journey”, the law proscribes it for those who are accused of similar offenses such as, ‘one who has sexual relations with a woman and her daughter, and a high priest’s daughter who has fornicated after entering into a marriage contract. Those who die by decapitation are ‘murderers and inhabitants of apostate cities.’

Finally, the penalty of strangulation is decreed ‘for one who strikes one’s mother or father; for kidnapping a person in Israel, for an elder who rebels against the tribunal’s decision; for a false prophet who prophesizes on behalf of an idol; for one who has sexual relations with another man’s wife; for bearing false witness against a priest’s daughter or having intercourse with her.’

Hence, one must admit that the Sanhedrin did have the authority to execute Jesus. If the main charges were “blasphemy”, “false prophecy”, “magic”, and “profaning the Sabbath”, it would have been most logical for the Hebrews to have him stoned or strangled. So why did they call for him to die by crucifixion? In my opinion, it can only be due to two reasons. First, with this option, the tribunal knew the Roman governor would have to decide. Secondly, in this simulacrum of justice, the majority of the judges were Sadducees, in other words the “severest” branch of the priestly caste.

Caiaphas was one of them and successfully won over a significant faction that attended the “lesser” Sanhedrin's morning session. The Sadducees, who were described in *The Acts* of the apostles as “Caiaphas’ fence of high priests”, were openly opposed to the Pharisees who enjoyed their own “theology” and “penal code.” If the tribunal had consisted of a majority of Pharisees, it is possible things would have been quite different and Jesus would have died by lapidation or strangulation.

But death by crucifixion was viler and much more humiliating than the punishments dictated by Mosaic Law and it is almost certain the bulk of the Sadducees were inclined to it from pushing their hatred for the imposter to the limit. Nevertheless, doubt was still blazing in my brain. Why had the Sanhedrin inquisitors’ cried out repeatedly for the crucifixion penalty before Pontius Pilate? Only when I knew the accusations that actually appeared in one of the scrolls Caiaphas carried, could I solve this mystery.

Until then, a completely unforeseen act would force me to change the Trojan Horse Project’s plans....

UNTITLED III

It was a few minutes to eight o'clock in the morning when the small contingent left Jerusalem's upper district behind. Initially, the Trojan Horse Project believed that when the Sanhedrin met with the Roman governor it would be precisely through the large portal and tunnel in the west façade of Antonia's Tower. This is the way I had gained access when Joseph of Arimathea escorted me. But it was not that way. Caiaphas and the Sadducees walked along a rampart in front of a moat and turned, without hesitation, around the northeast corner toward the other entrance to Pontius' headquarters in the Holy City.

I had already reached an agreement with Pilate and his first centurion, Civilis, that I could enter the fortress if I presented my papers to the guard on duty. I let the platoon pull me onward—almost by inertia, for several seconds while my brain searched for a solution. Once we went around the corner at Antonia's fortress, the sudden presence of the esteemed Joseph of Arimathea with another young Hebrew made me momentarily forget my misgivings.

Of course, Joseph was current with the steps Jesus and the high priest had taken. Since I did not see him at the trial, I inferred that his "contacts" kept him continually informed. The fact that he was here was proof of this. Caiaphas had to have seen Joseph. He passed practically by his side. Yet he did not greet him. When the elder beheld the Teacher, he started. Although it was likely that he had also been informed about the beating, the extent of it had been overlooked as evidenced by the way he went pale.

Without raising too much suspicion, he stayed behind with me until I joined him and his companion and we trailed behind the platoon. The man from Arimathea appeared to have lost the hope he had tried to infect me with in the courtyard at Annas' mansion. As he caught my distrust for talking in front of this unknown youngster, he hinted that we could speak openly.

His companion was one of David Zebedee's couriers who was here, he continued to explain, to convey the final news to the group of messengers that had been sent by David from the campsite at Gethsemane. So Joseph, the spy, and I remained in the background. As we approached the north gate to Antonia's Tower, they informed me how the luck had run for the rest of the disciples and those who had not noticed the arrest.

Most of the Greeks and the disciples who witnessed the Teacher's capture on the road, which runs along the foot of Mount Olivet, eventually returned to Simon "the leper's" olive grove where they awakened the eight apostles and the other followers who were oblivious to all that had happened. Minutes later, the young John Mark ran to the top of the Mount of Olives, warned David Zebedee who continued standing guard, and took advised him of the latest developments.

After the first moments of obvious confusion, the group gathered around the millstone at the entrance to the grove and began a lively argument. Although he was the leader of the apostles, Andrew was so confused that he could not say a single word. Consequently, it was Simon the Zealot who finally climbed onto the wall next to the oil mill and urged his companions to take up arms, launch an attack against the guards, and free Jesus.

According to the courier, who was an eyewitness to these events, nearly all of those who were present (about fifty), in the olive grove that morning responded vehemently to the invitation from Simon the "revolutionary." He was, as I have hinted on occasion, an active member of the

secret terrorist group the Zealots. It is quite possible they would have hurtled down the mountain in search of the Teacher if it had not been for Bartholomew's timely intervention.

After Simon the Zealot had spoken, Bartholomew asked for calm and reminded his friends of the teachings Jesus had imparted about nonviolence. With great sensibility, the apostle refreshed the agitated disciples' memories as he spoke the same words the Rabbi had uttered that very night when he had ordered them to protect and preserve their lives and to wait for the crucial moment for the dissemination and promulgation of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Bartholomew's thesis was strongly supported by John Zebedee's brother James who also recounted to his companions how Peter, some of the Greeks, and himself had drawn their swords at the instant of Jesus' capture and how the Teacher had commanded them to put away their swords. Their tempers seemed to be subsiding. After Phillip and Matthew made contributions, Thomas, with his characteristic pragmatism, insisted on the necessity of "not exposing themselves to mortal danger," which was what Jesus had advised his friend Lazarus. Thomas' reasoning and imploring, and the disciples' requests for them to disperse and wait for new information, caused Christ's followers to subdue their eagerness to fight. At last the disciples disappeared.

By 2:30 or 3:45 that morning, the olive grove was deserted. Only David Zebedee and a small group of messengers remained at the campsite in preparation for a mission, which they intimated, would be vital. The intrepid disciple knew how to organize things so he could transmit noteworthy and precise information about the course of events from John Zebedee to Joseph of Arimathea and on to other agents. At approximately every hour, one of his swift messengers met with the aforementioned men and transported the news to an improvised "headquarters" at Gethsemane. From there, David sent other couriers to points where they had agreed to hide the apostles: five of them—Bartholomew, Phillip, the twins, and Thomas would stay in the villages of Bethpage and Bethany. The remaining four—Simon the Zealot, James, Thomas, and Andrew, would stay in Jerusalem.

When I asked the emissary about Peter, the young man reassured me. Shortly after dawn, David had found him near the campsite, listless and full of sadness. It was very probable at that time neither David Zebedee, nor the spy nor any of the disciples knew the true reason why the fiery Simon felt such immense anguish. Anyway, David ordered one of the couriers to escort him to Nicodemus' house in the Holy City where his brother Andrew and three of the other apostles were lodging.

The same messenger who accompanied Joseph of Arimathea also informed me that soon after Peter left, Judas and one of the Teacher's siblings entered the olive grove. He had arrived before the rest of the family. It was there that he learned about Jesus' tragic arrest. At David Zebedee's request, he returned to the path which passed over Mount Olivet and rejoined his mother Mary, and the rest the members of his family.

David's instructions were for the Teacher's family to stay in Mary and Martha's house in Bethany for the moment. And this was done. This meant Jesus of Nazareth's mother, Mary, was already near Jerusalem...and I assume she would be warned about what was happening with her son. The possibility of meeting Mary made me tremble...

The wind blew harder. When we reached Caiaphas and his followers, we learned that one of the two sentinels who were stationed on the north side of the exterior wall surrounding the fortress, had gone inside the barracks to announce the presence of this distinguished group of

priests. Apparently, the high priest had apprised the soldier that the governor was already aware of this early visit.

Joseph and I concluded that the Jews who had requested an escort last night could have informed Pontius Pilate of this event. If this were the case, then Pontius had been expecting the Sanhedrin's representatives for a long time. As we waited at the gates in the stone barricade, I was going to use the order the governor had personally extended to me to get ahead of Caiaphas and his platoon. Joseph nodded, adding that he intended to follow alongside the Teacher and, presumably, we would see the inside of the fortress again.

So dismissing my pre-arranged entrance into Antonia's Tower via the tunnel of the west wing, I extracted the letter of safe conduct and showed it to the mercenary. When he read the authorization, and heard Civilis' name, he granted me admission, pointing to several soldiers who stood guard on the other side of the moat beside a huge iron gate that was practically set into the wall and flanked by two watchtowers.

As I crossed a drawbridge, which was similar to the one that provided access to the tunnel, one of the guards blocked my path. I had to repeat the operation. The sentinel examined the letter and directed me to wait. Then he left his post and went deep inside the fortress. This monumental gate was crowned by a plain arch that was supported by two enormous wooden panels secured to vertical posts capable of rotating inside giant stone boxes. I suppose this way it could be barred from the inside in times of danger or attack. A few minutes later, the soldier called out to me from the bottom of a stone staircase. I walked alone through a wide courtyard that was perfectly cobbled with round pebbles. At foot of the stairs, the soldier presented me to an officer.

"He will take you to Civilis," he said.

And he did. At the end of those fifteen steps, a centurion awaited me. The staircase provided access to a special type of rectangular meticulously tiled terrace that was enclosed on both sides by a series of marble balusters a meter tall. This was the main entrance to what we might call Pontius' private residence. The sumptuous building was relatively remote even though it was within the fortress. The officer guided me into a hall of extraordinary dimensions that branched into three pure white marble staircases.

"Wait here," he said as he walked towards the stairs that faced the foyer's double doors.

Two soldiers in chainmail stood with their lances crossed guarding the front of the staircase. I obeyed and stood admiring the succession of large multicolored, stained glass windows along the length of the walls which supplied the room with an abundance of natural light. The walls, which were lined with granite from Siena, contained many niches with busts of the emperor, Greek vases decorated with mythological scenes, and silver candelabras.

The floor of the hall was paved with an extensive mosaic which had nothing to envy from the ones I had seen in the ruins of Pompeii. I was so absorbed in its exquisite design that I did not notice Civilis' arrival. The centurion and commander of the legion saluted me as he smiled. On this occasion, he wore a brilliantly polished metal helmet topped by a crest of red feathers. Before I could explain my desire to change my plans, Civilis walked ahead of me to the door of the hall, and pointed to the gate in the rampart.

“The day has just gotten complicated. Pontius must receive several representatives from the Jewish Council of Justice this morning,” he said with a gesture of disgust.

“I know,” I replied. “And that is just what I want to talk to you about.”

The centurion looked at me in surprise.

“I heard the Jews are trying to judge a magician. I have seen them go by. You know I am interested in the stars and their influences. So I would like to request a small change of plans from you and the governor.”

Civilis continued listening to me attentively.

“I have learned,” I proceeded, “that this man called Jesus of Nazareth has performed great miracles and in an abuse of your hospitality, I would like to be present when he is introduced to Pontius.”

Before the centurion could reply, I clinched my words with a statement I expected would only ignite half of the Roman’s curiosity.

“I know today is the day that you, I, the governor, and the entire city will have the opportunity to witness a strange celestial event.”

The pragmatic, incredulous officer grinned derisively and limited himself to answering, “Very well, Jason. I will ask Pontius.”

Civilis disappeared up the middle staircase, warning me not to move from that spot.

“Those rats don’t have any scruples about asking us to execute one of their own people,” he remarked referring to the priests who were waiting next to the barricade outside, “and yet they won’t enter the praetorium for fear of contaminating themselves so that they won’t be able to observe their damned Passover”.

Civilis was right. The Jews, especially members of the different priestly castes were prohibited from entering gentiles’ houses during the annual observance of Passover. As the gentiles were suspected of harboring food that could contain leavening and contact with fermented substances was strictly forbidden.¹

This made me think that the governor and his men did not have any other recourse than to listen to Caiaphas and the Sadducees “through the gates” of the praetorium. (I figured this was almost certainly very close to the same staircase I had ascended.) Accordingly, I prepared “Moses’ staff” for what was going to be the first official meeting between Pontius and the members of the Sanhedrin.

Indeed, at 8:15 in the morning on Friday April 7, the obese governor appeared at the top of the central staircase in the hall where I waited. He came accompanied by Civilis and three or four more centurions. On seeing me, he hurried down the stairs saluting me with his arm held

¹ The second order of the *Mishnah* states that on the evening of the fourteenth of Nisan, which is the eve of Passover, ‘one must search thoroughly for any food containing leavening (generally cereals) by the light of a candle’ [Major’s note].

high. Pontius had changed his attire. Given his capacity as Caesar's representative, for this particular affair he was wearing a short "muscular" metal cuirasse. It was beautifully crafted in the style of the best Greek armor of the time, and it shone like a mirror. Under the armor he wore a perfectly pressed bone colored silk tunic with three-quarters length sleeves and fringed with gold.

The governor's voluminous belly protruded from under the cuirasse presenting a profile that was scarcely knightly. A very faded Bordeaux colored *sagum* or military cloak encircled his neck and cascaded down his back. But what called my attention the most were his legs: they seemed to be tightly wrapped in strips of linen. This made me suspect that he suffered from varicose veins.

The head centurion had presented my request to Pontius beforehand. Civilis had so developed the celestial "omen" that Pontius was unable to contain his morbidity. As he questioned me, he invited me to walk with him to the door to his residence. I explained how the 'stars had indicated an ill-fated augury for this morning and how it would be best for everyone to take extreme precautions.' There was no time for anything else.

Pontius Pilate and his officers stopped on the terrace, meanwhile one of the centurions descended the staircase doubtlessly in search of Caiaphas and that Galilean who had started to spoil the governor's pleasant day. The wind ruffled Pontius, putting his hairpiece in difficulties. This must have caused his evident bad mood to increase. Having to go to the gates of the praetorium in order to receive the high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin had not made him very happy...

Soon I saw a group headed by Caiaphas emerge through the arch in the wall. Jesus and the Roman mercenary, who had him in his custody all night, were immediately behind him. John Zebedee, the Levites, and the Sanhedrin's servants, followed him. When they arrived at the bottom of the staircase, the Sadducees halted and informed the governor in Greek that their religion prevented them from taking a single step further. Pontius glanced at Civilis and with a sign of disgust, advanced so that he stood at the edge of the steps. Once there, he also spoke in Greek.

"What charges do you have against this man?" he inquired in a surly tone.

The judges exchanged looks and, at Caiaphas' order one of the Sadducees answered. "If this man were not an evil doer, we would not have brought him before you."

Pontius remained silent. He held up the edge of his mantle and began descending the stairs. Immediately, Civilis and the centurions hastened after him, quickly surrounding him. Always maintaining his silence, the Roman approached Jesus and observed him with interest. The Teacher stood with his hands tied behind his back and his head bowed. His hair, which was tousled by the wind, partially concealed the wounds on his face. Pontius walked in a complete circle around the Nazarene. Afterwards, without making a single comment, but with an obvious moue of repugnance on his lips, Pontius ascended the stairs again.

Indubitably—Civilis would later confirm my small suspicion—the governor had been previously informed of the Sanhedrin's morning session as well as the discrepancies that materialized when it was time for the judges to establish the charges. (According to Civilis, one of the servants, who was also Pilate's wife Claudia Procula's interpreter, knew the teachings of

Jesus of Nazareth, had told the governor about the Rabbi's miracles and predictions.) When Pilate was halfway up the staircase, he paused, turned on his heels, and faced the Hebrews steadfastly.

"Given that you are not in agreement about the charges, why don't you take this man away and judge him according to your own laws?" he suggested.

These words fell over the Sanhedrin like a jug of cold water: they had not expected such resistance from Pontius.

With visible nervousness, they replied, "We don't have the right to condemn a man to death. This agitator of our nation deserves to die for what he has said and done. This is why we bring him before you: so you can ratify our decision."

Pilate smiled maliciously. This public recognition of the Jews' powerlessness to pronounce and implement a death sentence, even against one of their own people, filled him with satisfaction. His hatred for the Jews was much deeper than I had supposed.

"I will not condemn this man without a trial," the Roman interjected as he pointed to Jesus with his right hand. "And I will never consent to you interrogating him until I have received the accusations...in writing," Pontius insisted emphatically.

However, the Roman had underestimated the Sanhedrin. When Pilate considered the affair settled and consequently dismissed this infuriating matter, Caiaphas gave one of the two scrolls he carried to the judicial scribe who accompanied him and asked the governor to hear the 'charges they were soliciting.' This tactic surprised Pontius who had no other choice than to stop in his tracks as he was on the point of entering his residence. Although he was becoming increasingly irritated by Caiaphas' and the Sadducees' tenacious persistence, he was prepared to listen to the contents of the parchment.

The scribe unrolled the scroll, adopted a solemn tone, and proceeded to read: "The Sanhedrin's tribunal claims this man is a malefactor and an agitator of our nation based on the following charges:

1. For corrupting our city and inciting the people to rebellion.
2. For preventing the payment of Caesar's tribute.
3. For considering himself the King of the Jews and propagating the creation of a new kingdom."

Once I knew the official charges, I understood that this text had nothing in common with what was discussed during the trial. Instead, Annas and the members of the council had rigged it in the second session of the tribunal that was held while the Teacher and the rest of us were waiting in the main courtyard of the Sanhedrin's building. Now this explained the bitter debates between Annas, the judges, and Caiaphas as well as the sudden appearance of the second scroll in the high priest's hands moments before he set out for Antonia's Tower. The Sadducees had very astutely prepared these three accusations in a way that Roman governor would be inevitably involved in the process.

Pontius asked Civilis to approach him and whispered something in his ear. The centurion nodded. (I subsequently learned from the commander in charge of the legion, that this confidential consultation had focused on the information in the prosecutor's possession which, as we all knew , indicated that the conspiracy against the Nazarene and had purely religious roots.

At the time Pontius comprehended the Sadducees' "change" in strategy only originated from their fanatical, blind hatred toward this visionary who had been capable of challenging the high priest's authority and ridiculing the priestly class.

Caiaphas and his cronies had unintentionally succeeded in their deception because Pontius Pilate, was already biased against Jesus, whom he practically ignored, from the very beginning since he was opposed to the 'spawn from a bad mother' as the Roman put it in his own words. (It is extremely important to consider these facts in respect to his behavior and the successive attempts of emperor's representative to release the Teacher. Nothing would have gratified his scorn of the Jew's supreme authority more than to make them bite the dust by freeing the prisoner.) Yet in spite of the governor, events were going to take an unexpected course...

Pontius said nothing. He directed a contemptuous look toward the judges, descended the staircase for the second time and made his way to the Galilean. Once there, the expectant general asked the Teacher what he had to contribute to his defense. Jesus did not raise his face. Civilis, who had lagged behind his leader, lifted his grapevine baton and prepared to strike the Galilean for what he considered a lack of respect. But Pontius stopped him.

Regardless of how much his annoyance and confusion increased, the Roman appreciated that this was not the most ideal setting for interrogating the prisoner. The Sanhedrin's mere presence could be an impediment for him as well as the defendant. Therefore, he turned to the first centurion and gave him instructions to bring the giant inside his residence.

Civilis motioned to the soldier who guarded the Rabbi, and both of them in addition to John Zebedee, and some of the Sanhedrin's servants followed Pilate and the officers. Caiaphas and the judges remained in the courtyard. The look of vexation reflected in their faces was clearly a manifestation of their frustrated desire to accompany Jesus of Nazareth and attend the private examination. However, his own religious fanaticism was about to play him a bad pass. I double very much that Pilate had authorized his presence at the aforementioned interrogation. As the prefect crosses in front of me, he made a gesture inviting me to join them.

"Tell me Jason," Pontius asked as we traversed the hall in the direction of the first staircase. "Do you know this sorcerer? Do you think he could be a Zealot?"

This was a particularly delicate moment for me. A few explanations would have sufficed to tilt the governor's unstable balance definitively in favor of the Teacher. But that was not my assignment. So I answered his question with another question.

"I understand your men were dispatched to the estate at Gethsemane last night with the purpose of searching for a possible Zealot camp. Did you find the guerillas?"

The governor, who found climbing the 28 stairs arduous work, stopped panting. "And how do you know that?"

While Civilis led the Nazarene and the small group through the luminous corridor lined with Numidian marble with Carrera pedestals scattered to the right and left with statutes upon them, I pacified Pontius by recounting my chance encounter with the two soldiers who were in pursuit of one of the "magician's" sympathizers.

Then, Pontius confessed that his information about Jesus of Nazareth went back for some years, especially since one of his centurions reported how this magician had cured one of

his most beloved servants in Capernaum. Little by little, Pontius Pilate had gathered enough data and confidence to know that the group lead by the Rabbi was not dangerous from the only point of view that interested him: a rebellion against Rome. The spies the governor had close to the Sanhedrin informed him of the numerous meetings held about arresting and getting rid of the Nazarene. Hence Pilate was current with the intentions of those who waited in the courtyard and with, in his words, ‘the mystical and visionary’ character of the movement headed by Jesus.

“Why would I satisfy their enviousness by stopping a few poor devils whose only wrong is their belief in fantasies and spells?”

These revelations from definitely opened my eyes. It was clear that I had also underestimated Pontius’ power. It was logical that in a province as intractable and turbulent as this one, that the powers from Rome would have the means and tentacles to know who was who. Evidently, Pontius knew the Teacher.

“If that is the case,” I interrupted inquisitively, “why did you agree to send a platoon of soldiers to Gethsemane?”

Again, the Roman smiled slyly, “You still don’t know these people. They are stubborn as mules. Besides, my relations—which we can call ‘commercial’—with Annas have always been excellent. I am not going to deny that the prefect’s office receives significant sums of money in exchange for certain favors.”

I did not dare inquire about the types of “favors” Caesar’s corrupt representative offered, but Pontius himself gave me a clue.

“Annas and the scavenger he has for a son-in-law have made great wealth from exploiting the people’s need for currency and sacrificial animals. I assume you heard that the setback suffered by the money changers and brokers on the Temple’s esplanade was absolutely caused by this Jesus. Well, my interest in this business partially obliges me to save appearances and help the former high priest in his aspiration to capture the magician.”

That Annas family’s blatant nepotism placed members of their ‘clan’ in key posts in the Temple was as an open secret. Hence, the governor’s action seemed entirely plausible. When Civilis arrived at the end of the corridor, he opened a door and allowed Pilate to pass through. Behind him, at the centurion’s orders, Jesus, John Zebedee, two additional officers, and I followed. The mercenaries and the servants remained outside.

As we burst into the room, I instantly recognized it as the oval office where I had my first interview with the governor. The north wing of the fortress was therefore perfectly connected to Pontius’ reception room. Now I understood why I had not seen guards at the door: it was the one that led to the private rooms and, on account, of the person who appeared on Wednesday morning, to the servants who announced the food.

Pontius Pilate went directly to his table, inviting the Nazarene to sit in the chair that Joseph of Arimathea had occupied. John timidly sat in the one I had used. The officers stood on either side of the Rabbi while Civilis took his usual position at the far end of the table to the governor’s left. I discreetly joined the head centurion.

The light that radiated through the huge window behind the Roman enabled me to scrutinize the Teacher’s face carefully. Jesus had, to a certain extent, abandoned his attitude of

permanent absence. Now his head was now lifted. His nose and his right zygomatic arch (which is the area around the malar bone or right cheekbone) were still very swollen so that it affected—as I feared—his eye. The wound above his left eyebrow seemed pretty well closed. The blood from his lips and nostrils had coagulated and then dried blackening part of his beard and mustache.

Pilate picked up the thread of the conversation again by telling the Rabbi that to begin with, he could assured that ‘he did not believe the first accusation.’

“I know your steps,” he said in Greek with a conciliatory air, “and it takes work to think that you are a political agitator.”

Jesus watched him with an air of weariness.

“In regard to the second accusation, has there been a time when you have not paid the tribute to Caesar?”

The Teacher nodded to John and answered, “Ask him or anyone has listened to me.”

The prefect questioned Zebedee with a look, and John confusedly explained that the Teacher and rest of the group always paid the taxes imposed by the Temple and by Caesar. When the disciple was ready to expand on other teachings, Pilate made a hand gesture commanding him to be silent.

“That is enough,” he said. “And take care not to inform anyone of what you have discussed with me!”

And he did. Not even the gospel written by John many years later, includes this part of his interview with the Roman governor and Jesus. (Moreover, none of the holy writings ever mentions his presence in the conversation. If this part of the interrogation, since it was removed from the Gospel of St. John— occurred inside the praetorium and therefore in private, how is it possible for Zebedee to describe it when he refers to the well-known subjects of the “kingdom” and the “truth” in John 18:28-38?) The only explanation is precisely that he was an exceptional witness.

Pilate addressed the Galilean again.

“In reference to the third charge, tell me, are you the King of the Jews?”

His tone was sincere. At least that was my impression. The Teacher smiled faintly. As he did, one of the cracks in his lower lip reopened and a tiny rivulet of blood rushed between the hairs in his beard.

“Pilate, are you asking this question for yourself or from what you have gathered from the accusers?” the Rabbi countered.

The governor’s eyes widened in indignance.

“Am I a Jew? Your own people have delivered you to me and the highest priests have asked me to give you the death penalty.”

Pilate attempted to regain his composure. He flashed his gold teeth adding, "I doubt the validity of these accusations and I am only trying to discover for myself what it is you have done. But I ask you a second time, have you said that you are the King of the Jews and that you intend to form a new kingdom?"

The Galilean did not delay his response.

"Don't you see that my kingdom is not in this world? If it were here, my disciples would have fought to keep me from being captured by the Jews. My presence here tied up before you demonstrates to all men that the kingdom is a spiritual dominion: a fellowship of men who through love and faith become children of god. This is equally offered to Jews and Gentiles."

Pilate stood up and stuck the table with the palm of his hand.

"Hence you are the king!" he declared unable to repress his surprise.

"Yes," the prisoner replied facing him. "I am this type of king and my kingdom is the family of those who believe in my father who is in heaven. I was born to reveal my father to all men and to bear witness to the truth of god. And now I swear that the lover of the truth hears me."

Pilate took a small detour around the table, then he stood between John and the prisoner.

"The truth! What is the truth? Who knows it?" he retorted.

Before Jesus could answer, he made a sign to Civilis making him to understand that the interrogation was finished. The officers forced Jesus to stand. Pontius opened the door and ordered his men to take the Nazarene to Caiaphas. As we went back down the corridor, Pilate came up next to me and made a single eloquent comment.

"That man is a stoic. I am familiar with his teachings and I know they preach that 'the wise man is always a king.'"

After this reasoning, I deduced that the Roman was ready to release Jesus. When he appeared in front of the Jews for the second time, his attitude confirmed my prediction. A little before nine o'clock in the morning Pontius looked out from the terrace. He adopted an authoritative tone as he announced the sentence.

"I have questioned this man and I see that he is not guilty of anything. I do not consider him guilty of the charges you have formulated against him. For his reason, I think he must be released."

Caiaphas and the Sadducees were baffled. Yet in an instant, they reacted by shouting and making a thousand furious gestures. Civilis gave Pontius a questioning look as he grabbed his sword. However the governor asked for calm. One of the officers quickly returned inside the praetorium probably to search for reinforcements. A Sanhedrin, who was very agitated, broke off from the group and climbed up three or four steps as he rebuked Pilate.

"This man incites the people. He started in Galilee and he has continued throughout Judea. He is the author of rebellions and a criminal. If you allow this man to go free, you will regret it for a long time..."

Without meaning to, this Sadducee had just supplied Pilate with a reason for evading this disagreeable subject, at least temporarily. The governor approached his head centurion.

“This man is a Galilean. Take him to Herod immediately,” he said.

Civilis prepared to carry out Pontius’ will. When he moved toward the soldier who was in charge of guarding the Teacher, Pilate turned from the top of the platform.

“Oh! And as soon as he has been interrogated, bring me their conclusions,” he added.

This time it was Civilis himself who had custody of the Teacher. The Jews’ spirits were so incensed that the centurion had the good judgment to set out on the road to Herod Antipas’ residence surrounded by a small escort of ten soldiers.

Herod Antipas was the tetrarch for Galilee and, like Pilate, was visiting Jerusalem for some days. This Herod was the son of the infamous Herod the Great who had ordered the killing of all boys two years old and younger in Bethlehem and its vicinity. A massacre was very typical for the trajectory and character of the king who was hated by the populace and referred to by the pejorative “Edomite servant.” Through numerous investigations, the Trojan Horse Project ascertained this bloody massacre of innocents had claimed nearly a score of boys.¹

Civilis was at the front of the group when it crossed the drawbridge. After the soldiers bundled up the Teacher, they formed two rows. The rest of the retinue: Caiaphas, a handful of judges, Judas Iscariot, John Zebedee, the venerable Joseph of Arimathea, and I were short distance away. As we departed the fortress, I turned to the open gate in the north wall and confusion reigned in my mind once more. According to the gospels, ‘a great crowd’ would go to the very gates of the praetorium. How could that be?

Since the moment of my interview with Pontius Pilate, which had been held more or less in private, only a limited number of representatives from the Sanhedrin had access to the inside of Antonia’s Tower. Besides, I continued reflecting, as we descended to the city’s upper district, without the express consent of the governor or his officers no Hebrew could penetrate the wall or the exterior barricade much less the moat that surrounded the Roman’s general barracks. Therefore, what was going to happen so that the Jewish multitude could reach the staircase to Pontius’ private residence?

John, Jesus’ beloved disciple, immediately informed Joseph and the messenger about what transpired at the foot of the praetorium and during the private interrogation, however he avoided mentioning his conversation with the Roman. Zebedee had regained hope. His outlook was optimistic in view of Pilate’s declarations. They truly gave him a reason. If the process had remained inside of this line practically circumscribed by the small circle of Sanhedrin, and the foreign governor, perhaps the Teacher’s luck would have been otherwise. But the machinations of

¹ In advance of the mission, I received complete information about the tetrarch or governor of Galilee. Herod had the nickname Antipas or “same as his father” and the truth is this moniker fit him perfectly. Herod Antipas had inherited the governorship of the northern lands (Galilee) at the death of his father Herod the Great in the year 4 of our era. He was seventeen years old. According to his father’s first will, Antipas should have received the kingdom of Judea. But Herod the Great changed his mind and substituted his other son Archelaus whom he put in charge of the Kingdom of Judea. As I said, Antipas received Galilee. A third son Philip was appointed tetrarch of Ituraea. It was exactly after the latter event, that Herod Antipas took a wife who was no less famous: Herodias. Apparently, she was responsible for the murder of Jesus of Nazareth’s distant cousin, John the Baptist [Major’s note].

Caiaphas and his men were relentless... Once the “courier” received the latest news about Jesus, he took his leave of the Rabbi’s friends and disappeared down the road to the campsite at Gethsemane.

As we went under the Fish Gate, the man from Arimathea saw how a contingent of Hebrews presided over by a large band of Temple leaders and other Pharisees joined the high priest and the Sadducees. He expressed his dismay. While he was waiting in front of the stone barricade at Antonia’s Tower, Joseph had acquired information that would end up complicating everything: in a mutual agreement with the judges, Annas had secretly started to distribute gold coins that belonged to the Temple’s treasury. After writing down the names of the recipients of each one of the bribes, the three *gizbarim* or treasurers had given each of them a common assignment: ‘Cry before Pontius Pilate for the death of the imposter from Galilee.’

On seeing how the initial group of Sadducees had increased perceptibly, I asked the man from Arimathea how Caiaphas thought he was going to get the crowd inside the fortress to the palace.

“I doubt very much that Pilate and his troops will authorize it,” I remarked.

Joseph cleared my doubt in a second. Coincidentally, on the eve of Passover, this very Friday, the Jews enjoyed an ancient prerogative. According to the tradition, hundreds of Hebrews trekked to the area outside the praetorium in order to participate in the release of one prisoner. This pardon constituted one of the tokens of sympathy and friendship from Rome toward its citizens even though the power for it fell to the governor.

Consequently, event had the eminent character of a commemoration and so during the preceding days, many people from the vicinity of Jerusalem as well as thousands of pilgrims would vocally support one candidate or another. On this occasion, the name that rang with the most intensity among the Hebrews was that of Barabbas. Joseph of Arimathea maintained he was an active member of the revolutionary group the Zealots, the son of an unknown father, and a vile, bloodthirsty man who was captured by the Roman forces during a revolt.¹

This clarification by Jesus’ old friend made me understand many things. In the first place, from pure logic, the city had awakened on this Friday morning on April 7 without the least news about the arrest of their idol, Jesus of Nazareth. Only a few knew about it. Secondly, the approaching inevitable congregation of Jews at Pilate’s residence had nothing to do with the Teacher from Galilee. If Jesus had not been taken prisoner the event still would have been observed in the same way. I say it was the Sanhedrin’s evil scheming and the almost total absence of the Nazarene’s friends and supporters from the mass meeting to request the liberation of one prisoner which caused things to become what we already know.

Herod Antipas’ provisional residence during his brief stay in Jerusalem was the former palace of the ancient Hamoneans. It was situated very close to the wall that ran from Herod the Great’s palatial complex in the far west end of the city to the Temple. It was a very old building made of enormous stone blocks which measured twenty cubits high by ten cubits wide and which,

¹ When I consulted *Santa Claus’* archives on the central computers, I confirmed that the name Barabbas was of Semitic (more precisely Aramaic) origin. It could have various interpretations. “Bar” means “son” in Aramaic and “rabba” means teacher or rabbi. The translation of “Bar Abba” also corresponds to “son of his father” which is a way to name anyone whose father was unknown [Major’s note].

in the words of Josephus, ‘could not be dug out, broken with iron, nor moved with all of the machines in the world.’

At the palace gates, a party of Antipas’ personal guards, which was mostly composed of Thracian, German, and Gallic mercenaries, passed us. Many of them had actually first served under Herod’s father.¹ They were dressed in long green tunics with three quarter length sleeves. A special type of “shirt” covered their torsos and lower abdomens it had a base of braided armor topped by metallic scales. Nearly all of them wore a leather quiver full of arrows on their backs. (In view of the considerable number of soldiers I detected inside the palace, Herod must have feared for his personal security.)

Civilis exchanged some words with the porters and the guard opened a path for the Roman escort and the small group of priests. The rest, including Joseph of Arimathea, had to wait outside the building. Once again, fortune was on my side. Before we set off on the walkway into the palace’s interior, the centurion took me by the arm announcing that the tetrarch was a fan of Greek culture and that if I considered it appropriate, he would like the pleasure of presenting me to Herod and telling him about my virtues as an astrologer in the emperor’s service.

Delighted, I accepted on principle. However, the Trojan Horse Project’s plans did not include any type of interview with this character. Of course the centurion could not have imagined could not have imagined that the interview between Antipas and Jesus of Nazareth was going to be so fleeting as to be useless.

Despite the palace’s antiquity, Herod had endeavored to embellish it beyond all expectations. The central courtyard contained a rectangular pool and countless doves pecked at its tiling. Several servants, always accompanied by *somatophylakes* or bodyguards from Herod’s court (they all answered to the name Corinth) lead us to the upper level. The first floor of the palace completely opened into an inner garden with an artistic marble senate, which was Antipas’ courtroom.

My attention was first called to a magnificently carved black wooden armchair which presided on the left side of the spacious salon that was perfectly illuminated by three large north facing windows. It was unquestionably a throne since it was also elevated above the dark wooden parquet floor. A short distance away, a circular pool that was four or five meters in diameter, occupied the center of the room. It was difficult to determine its exact depth because of the white liquid that filled it. About twenty individuals were reclining on voluminous white feather pillows at the foot of the throne.

As soon as they saw us, there was a long silence. As much as I tried to identify Antipas, I did not succeed. The centurion brought the Teacher before the wooden armchair while the tetrarch’s pleiad, groomed as “friends and cousins” gazed at the Galilean and the Roman in stupefaction from their places near the pool. Finally, Caiaphas broke the violent silence. He advanced towards the group of courtiers and extended the scroll containing the charges to an extremely thin person who was also recumbent, half-hidden among the cushions.

As he stood, a Herod appeared who was hard to imagine. Despite his 55 years, he looked like an old man. Beneath his practically transparent tunic, I discerned a skin covered, skeleton

¹ Some of the Gauls had formed a part of Cleopatra’s guard, which had totaled more than 400 during her reign in Egypt [Major’s note].

littered with crusty ashen scabs. The Romans called this ailment *mentagra*.¹ Today we would consider these ulcers as a likely case of syphilis since they were especially plentiful on his hands, face, and neck. To top it off, Antipas' long glossy hair was dyed a spectacular shade of blonde and cut unevenly over his forehead.

After examining the parchment, Herod stared at Jesus, while the high priest did his utmost to make all types of explanations about the trial against the imposter and the governor's wish for the tetrarch to interrogate the Galilean. Antipas threw the scroll at Caiaphas' feet. Confused by the governor's unexpected reaction, Caiaphas fell silent. One of the Levites rushed to retrieve the parchment.

Without saying a word, the lean tetrarch began to walk in circles round the Nazarene. In the end, he stopped in front of Jesus and burst into loud laughter. The courtiers did not hesitate to imitate him. Their guffaws echoed against the room's marble walls. Then Herod raised his arms and the raucous laughter ceased instantly. He slowly lowered his hands.

"And so, at last the presumptuous miracle worker ends up visiting the old fox," he remarked bemusedly.

Evidently, the tetrarch knew about the Teacher and was aware of the phrase spoken by Jesus in which he had referred to him as a fox. Antipas waited for the prisoner to respond. However, the Rabbi's head was slumped over his chest and he did not deign to look at Antipas.

For more than a quarter of an hour the son of Herod the Great assaulted the Teacher with questions. Yet he did not obtain a single reply. Judging from the focus of Antipas' questions, one of his main concerns centered on the possibility that the Galilean was the reincarnation of John the Baptist whom he had executed three years ago.² The fact that remorse and fear had seized the governor's soul immediately jumped into one's view of him; he was a cruel despot. Disappointed by the Galilean's silence, Herod changed his tactics. He motioned to one of his loyal officials.

"Menaham! Call Herodias!" he shouted.

And the elderly *syntrophos* or preceptor hurried from room to room searching the audiences for his master's lover. Far from being irritated by the Galilean's muteness, Herod

¹ In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder states that the ulcers from this illness always start on the chin, hence the name "*mentagra*". According to our computer, a citizen from Perugia brought this disease from Asia [Major's note].

² When Herod Antipas fell in love with the wife of his brother Philip, who was the tetrarch of Ituraea, which is east of Jordan, he made an opportune trip to Rome to be with Herodias. His legitimate wife, the daughter of the Arab sheik Aretas, the fourth king of the Nabataeans, had to leave Israel to return to her family. Whence John the Baptist took every opportunity to reproach Herod and his lover Herodias for their permanent adultery. The criticism from Jesus' cousin was so harsh that Antipas—possibly at Herodias recommendation—ordered John to be imprisoned in a separate fortress on the edge of the Dead Sea, which the Bedouins still call Masada or the Hanging Palace. He would be decapitated soon after. Since then Antipas lived consumed with terror believing John the Baptist's ghost would return some day to exact justice. Based upon our investigations, it was very unlikely Antipas had agreed to behead John following the famous dance performed by Herodias' daughter Salome. At that time, Salome would have been an adolescent. Thanks to Josephus' testimony and the inscription on the currency in which she appeared next to her husband Aristobulus, we know Herod's stepdaughter's real name. According to historians, the most logical and plausible version is John the Baptist was jailed and executed because of his aggravating criticism of the tetrarch and Philip's wife [Major's note].

seemed to be privately pleased. His attitude was very odd. He pretended not to slip on the polished marble tile inlaid with rose coral as he walked around the edge of the pool.

Just as the centurion had mentioned, Antipas' passion for the Hellenism was notable not only in his attire and in the people who surrounded him, but also in the palace's decorations. For example, the floor was exquisitely composed of tiny uniform pieces of brilliant coral, which is called "angel's skin" that was most likely extracted in the Mediterranean. It was one of the most eloquent proofs of this famous character's refinement. The Phoenician artisans in Antipas' service had successfully formed a beautiful gigantic scene of the legendary Medusa and Perseus, her assassin¹ by setting thousands of small pieces of coral into the sheets of marble.

So I drew near Civilis' side and, in a whisper, asked him why the tetrarch was adopting this behavior. Knowing a lot about Antipas' messy life, the centurion offered an explanation that was not insignificant.

"Everyone in Israel knows that Herod feared and respected the fiery prophet they called John the Baptist. On one occasion, he came to the crazy idea that Jesus of Galilee could be John. It will not be strange if, after evaluating the prisoner's silence and his unbalanced reasoning, he recovers his composure."

Suddenly Antipas emerged from his reverie and approached the pool with a crystal glass. He bent down, filling it with the white liquid. Then he placed it at the height of the Nazarene's face.

"Tell me, Galilean, can you turn milk into wine?" he asked sarcastically.

Jesus was motionless; he did not blink. His head was still bowed. Herod shrugged and returned to his feather bed. One of his servants, possibly an eunuch, judging from the rings in his earlobes, his hips, and his feminine gestures, knelt before the tetrarch and proceeded to put on his sandals.

Those sandals with golden straps clamored for my attention. Both soles were covered with a series of very small cushions. Once they were on his feet, Antipas rose again and to my surprise, his body weight caused the small bags to ooze a fragrant transparent liquid. They were "vaporizers"! (This was a special type of deodorizer which started being all the rage among the wealthy classes in Rome and Greece. It largely eliminated the unpleasant odor of perspiration.)

Antipas would not give up trying to have the Teacher entertain him with some of his miracles. He grabbed a silver tray with a few strips of meat arranged on it and presented it to Jesus.

"If you were able to multiply fish and bread, I guess it would not be too difficult to do the same with these flamingo tongues. Would you be so kind?" he chided in closing.

¹ The Greek legend tells of three sister, the Gorgons, who had a single eye and a single tooth at their disposal. When they wanted to see or eat, it would pass from one of them to the others. This symbolized that envy, slander, and hatred could be seen with one eye and fed with one tooth. One of these terrible sisters, who was older than mankind and had snakes for hair (Medusa), had the power to transform anyone who looked at her into stone. But she was killed by Perseus who cut off her head. According to the myth, some of her blood dropped into the sea and turned into coral. Henceforth coral was largely accepted among these people as a valuable charm against the "evil eye" and envy [Major's note].

The silence was the only answer. Herod, who had progressed from jocular to choler, lifted the metal tray and let his favorite dish fall on the Rabbi's head and shoulders. The prank was momentarily supported by his acolytes' giggles, yet the Teacher was impassive. This grotesque scene was interrupted by the abrupt arrival of a woman.

On seeing her, Antipas rushed to meet her. He took her hand and led her to stand in front of Jesus. Even though she had crossed the hurdle of 40, the beautiful Herodias, Antipas' lover, aroused excitement. Her clothing only consisted of a double tunic formed by a number of gauzes from Malta, which were so transparent that her brown skin showed through. A white ribbon was tied across her temples: three rows of braids as black as her eyes rose above it. This complicated hairstyle was held at its absolute zenith by small conch shells and finished off with cylindrical curls.

When Civilis saw her, he stared at her small breasts that were perfectly visible through the fabric, then he turned to me and winked. Antipas' moved closer to Jesus, wagging his fingers at the flamingo tongues that were still entangled in Jesus' hair, he soothed the woman reassuring her that this magician was not even the shadow of the abhorrent John the Baptist.

With eyebrows and eyelashes imbued with glitter and eyelids shaded with some mixture of powdered lapis lazuli, Herodias carefully observed the prisoner. Then she swayed her hips without the least shyness as she walked away from the Teacher and sought to make herself comfortable in the wooden throne. Once there, before the general expectation, she made a sign to Antipas indicating that he should approach.

He obeyed instantly. After she whispered something, the tetrarch smiled wickedly, descended the parquet platform and stood behind the Rabbi. He promptly grasped the edge of Jesus' tunic and slowly raised it so Herodias and the courtesans could contemplate the Nazarene's legs. Antipas continued until he uncovered the prisoner's entire muscular thigh as well as the loincloth that covered him. Herodias's carmine red lips opened with palpable admiration at the same time a wave of indignation started to burn my belly. Civilis noticed my increasing anger and bent his head towards me.

"Don't be alarmed. The Jewish law allows this pig up to a total of eighteen women, yet his impotency is so well known and notorious that this whore seeks solace among the stable slaves...and Herod knows it. Herodias has a hold on his testicles and the throne," he said.

The officer's words were so correctly divined that they were prophetic. How little Antipas suspected this woman would be the precise cause of his final disgrace.¹ The centurion

¹ The Major's explosive declaration caused me to review as many documents as I could in search of Herod Antipas' unfortunate end. To my great astonishment, I discovered the son of Herod the Great had finally been a victim of the ambition and the domination of his mistress Herodias. After the death of Emperor Tiberius in the year 37, the new Caesar, Gaius alias "Caligula" or "Little Boot" released another member of Herod's brother's large family from prison in Rome. To the exasperation of Antipas and his lover, Herod Agrippa was made King of Israel. At Herodias' urging, Antipas travelled to Rome to ask for the title of king. However, Caligula, who in the days of the year 39 could be found in the middle of a military campaign in Gaul, not only refused to fulfill the wish of the Tetrarch of Galilee, but also took away the disappointed "old fox's" title and banished him. Flavius Josephus and Tillemont both report that Herod Antipas and his wife Herodias saw themselves forced to travel to Spain where they may have settled and died. (At that time, there were already seven Mediterranean cities on the Iberian peninsula with significant

dug a trench through this humiliating scene. Time was pressing on, so with amiable but firm words, he begged the tetrarch if he would tell him his verdict with respect to the prisoner.

“Verdict?” countered Antipas, who by this time understood that the Galilean did not wish to open his mouth. “Tell Pontius I am grateful for his courtesy, but Judea is not inside my jurisdiction. He will be the one to decide.”

Caiaphas and the priests were as dissatisfied as Antipas. They headed for the exit. Meanwhile, Civilis saluted the tetrarch and Herodias with his arm held high, then he pushed Jesus making him to understand that the visit had ended. As we left, the room still resonated with the applause from Herod’s entourage since they were extremely satisfied by his final mocking gesture and the Edomite’s ridicule of Jesus. (Once again, the testimony of some exegetes does not coincide with reality. Jesus was not covered with a white cloak as a sign of dementia, as some biblical commentators indicated, but by a brilliant red one which reflected Herod Antipas’ derision on account of his portrayal of Jesus as a “liberator” or “king” of the rabble. This mantle, which would accompany Jesus of Nazareth until the crucial moment of the flogging, was, as we will see much later, the same as the ones the Roman mercenaries wore.)

At ten o’clock in the morning, the escort departed from the Hasmonean’s palace and set out again on the way back to Antonia’s fortress. A tight group of Hebrews followed silently and vigilantly behind the soldiers who protected the Rabbi, just as they had on the outward journey.

Just then Judas Iscariot unexpectedly separated from the faction headed by Caiaphas and surprised me with a question. Initially he hesitated. He looked around suspiciously and eventually decided to talk to me. Judas must have thought my constant presence with the Teacher had converted me into one of his followers. Nonetheless, he ended up overcoming his distrust and withdrew from the escorting platoon to inquire how the interrogation had unfolded at Antipas’ palace. I related what happened and Iscariot’s entire commentary consisted of a lament for Jesus’ silence.

“What a waste of a new opportunity!” he added.

I remarked that I did not understand. Iscariot avoided my eyes as he told me about his time as a disciple of John the Baptist and how he had never forgiven the Teacher for not interceding for John’s life. Now, according to the traitor, Jesus had not done a thing to vindicate the memory of his friend and cousin. This confession bewildered me. The fact that Iscariot had joined the Nazarene as a result of John the Baptist’s imprisonment, led me to concluded that a good part of his hatred for the Rabbi was dragged along by those circumstances.

We both kept quiet. I had an ardent desire to ask him the reason for his betrayal, but I did not have the courage. I only dared to question him about why he had walked ahead of the group of soldiers on the night of the arrest. Even though Judas was shunned and humiliated by everyone, he felt a need to be sincere. Yet his reply was merely half-true...

“I know no one believes me,” he complained, “but my intention was good. I walked out in front of the soldiers and Levites to warn the Teacher and my companions at the campsite of the proximity of the troops who were coming to arrest him.”

Jewish settlements as well as other areas in Andalucía where Herod could have established his residence) [JJB’s note].

I said nothing. Indeed, this perspective was difficult to accept. Given his cowardice, it was feasible he had plotted such an “arrangement.” This way the disciples would not contest his presence. Yet if these really were his intentions, they were cut short at the Nazarene’s unexpected presence in the middle of the road that led to the olive grove. I did not have time for more.

Civilis and his men re-entered the city walls north of Antonia’s Tower as they advanced toward the steps of the praetorium. When we arrived at the balcony where the first part of the interrogation had been held, I was perplexed by the appearance of a semi-circular platform with a curule seat on it, which is generally used for dispensing justice. The centurion left Jesus in the care of his men and then went inside the residence. As usual, the rest of the Hebrews stood waiting at the bottom of the stairs with the high priest in the first row. This time Joseph of Arimathea had entered the Tower’s grounds. Pilate appeared without delay, sat on the curule, and addressed Caiaphas and the Sadducees.

“You brought this man before me charged with corrupting the people, impeding the payment of Caesar’s tribute, and pretending to be the King of the Jews. I have questioned him and I do not believe he is guilty of these allegations. Actually, I don’t see any crime. I sent him to Herod and the tetrarch must have arrived at the same conclusion because now he has sent him back to me. With complete certainty, I say this man has not committed any crime to justify his death. If you believe he must be punished, I am prepared to impose a penalty before releasing him.”

Unable to contain his joy, John jumped up and hugged Joseph of Arimathea. Yet when everything seemed to be tilted in the Nazarene’s favor, hundreds of Hebrews suddenly invaded the courtyard between the staircase and gate in the wall. They broke in calmly and quietly with a group of Roman soldiers in front of them. Exactly as the venerable Arimathean had warned me, this crowd had come to the governor’s residence with eager to help pardon a prisoner.

It is very important to note that when this mass of humanity arrived in front of Pontius residence—with the guard’s permission—none of the Israelites knew what was happening. They were left there, in full sight of Jesus and the priests, to be swept along by the adroit and opportune manipulation of the Sadducees and Caiaphas. If the trial against Jesus had taken place at another time or on another day without the presence of this mob, it is possible that the Sanhedrin would not have had things come out the way they wanted.

Pilate went out when the crowd arrived. As a matter of fact, the placement of the platform and the seat on top of the balcony’s tiled floor was solely and exclusively for the traditional amnesty ceremony. However, Pontius allowed himself to be carried away by his good faith, and consequently committed a serious error. After a succession of consultations with his centurions, Pilate stood up from his seat, raised his voice and asked the multitude the name of their chosen prisoner.

“Barabbas,” the people answered in unison.

Until that moment, neither Pilate nor the judges had mentioned Jesus’ name. Just as I expected, this indicated the Hebrews had arrived at the praetorium with the premeditated intention of soliciting the prefect for the terrorist’s release and said so before Pilate requested silence and explained how the priests had brought Jesus to him and what he was accused of. In essence, this throng, which was still unaware that the Rabbi from Galilee was present, had clamored for Barabbas the Zealot.

Nevertheless, as it has already been observed, the timely intervention of Caiaphas, his supporters, and the gold they had distributed to a handful of Jews who were strategically mixed into the crowd, insured that the balance would eventually tip toward the Sanhedrin. As soon as Pontius finished explaining Jesus' presence at the tribunal and left it quite clear that he 'could not see any reason which justified the man's sentence,' he formulated a second question.

"Who do you want to release: Barabbas, the murderer or Jesus from Galilee?"

For an instant, the hundred or so Jews were astonished. They did not offer a tremendous response. Apparently, the people were indecisive. Caiaphas and the Sadducees, being aware of the serious risk posed by this silence, charged towards Pilate shouting forcefully.

"Barabbas! Barabbas!"

This initiated a rapid echo among the Sanhedrin. Other voices rose from different parts of the crowded courtyard. Doubtlessly, these belonged to the bribed Hebrews who noisily demanded the revolutionary's release. In a matter of seconds, the entire mass imitated the priests by joining Caiaphas in one chorus. In vain John Zebedee almost burned his throat screaming the name of his Teacher. His voice was buried by "Barabbas!" categorical, widespread, and repeated again and again until the governor lifted his arms commanding silence.

Pontius' eyes blazed with hatred for the Sadducees who had flagrantly instigated the manipulation of an amorphous ignorant crowd. In my opinion, the source of the Roman governor's irritation was not the Galilean's circumstances, nor what he was sentenced to; instead he was infuriated by the priestly class's Olympic scorn for his decision to free the Teacher. But Pilate's mistake of offering Jesus as a possible candidate for release was still subject to rectification. When he spoke again, he adopted a reproachful tone for their treacherous behavior.

"How is it possible to choose the life of a murderer," he said, pointing directly to Caiaphas, "over this Galilean whose worst crime is believing that he is the King of the Jews?"

The reaction to these words was completely contrary to what Pilate expected. The judges demonstrated that they were exceedingly offended by what they considered to be an insult to their national sovereignty by inciting the crowd to roar even more vociferously for the Zealot's freedom. And it did. The majority of these Jews, who were uneducated fullers, stevedores, mendicants, pilgrims, the unemployed, and I assume, Levites who were currently not on duty at the Temple, raised their voices repeatedly demanding Barabbas.

This sudden popular explosion made the governor leery so, accompanied by his officers, he withdrew to deliberate. Now I am convinced that if Pilate had not introduced the Nazarene into the nomination, he would not have been compromised before the priest's dignitaries. Meanwhile, Jesus remained calm as he faced the crowd. These minutes of waiting and those which followed were decisive moments for Caiaphas.

He made the most of Pilate's brief absence to devise a plot for his cohorts to scatter among the people who were gathered there and urge them to demand the release of the famous Barabbas without stopping....It was sad and disappointing to see how many of these people knew the Galilean and admired his words and his bravery in cleaning the Gentile's esplanade of the sacrilegious business of money changers and brokers. Yet in an instant, without the least personal discernment, they had turned against the defenseless Jesus.

Pontius returned to his seat and surveyed the crowd. He rested his elbows on the arms of the curule and supported his head on his interlaced fingers in a reflective attitude. With a degree of precaution, Civilis had given orders for the gate in the wall to be shut and the deployment of various armed units around the crowd. It was a pity the Jews did not notice the Romans' maneuvers at that time. Knowing how cognizant they were of Pilate's cruelty, perhaps if they had seen how they had been stealthily surrounded, they would have been more concerned about their own security than about anyone's release.

The commander in charge of the legion had just conveyed precise orders to his men. If they saw themselves threatened, they were authorized to draw their swords. The Roman governor kept quiet for several minutes. The multitude imitated him as they awaited his decision. And we were there when one of the servants from the praetorium appeared on the balcony, delivering a sealed missive to Civilis and simultaneously communicating something to him. The centurion examined the small sheet of parchment and walked to the chair where Pontius sat, taking him out of his thoughts.

The governor opened the note. After reading it carefully, he stood up. Caiaphas, the judges, and everyone present were intrigued. Pontius seemed to hesitate. He paced the terrace a couple of times and finally paused before the crowd. He announced that he had received a letter from his wife Claudia Procula and he wished to read it publically. The wind forced him to hold the parchment with both of his hands. With a clear, powerful voice he proceeded to read, "'I beg you not to take any part in the condemnation of an innocent, honorable man called Jesus'" said the letter. "'Last night in my dreams, I suffered very much on account of him.'"

Once Joseph of Arimathea was apprised of the letter's contents, he seemed remarkably cheerful. Although the esteemed man did not openly confess this to me, all signs pointed to the important fact that Pontius' wife knew and accepted Jesus' teachings (from what I could learn, some of Pontius' servants were members of Jesus' very first group of followers).¹

When first I noticed Civilis intense gaze, I did not associate the letter's text with Procula, but with the acute superstition that dominated the governor and the omen I had dared to engineer in the centurion's presence. It was a little later, as we went to the fortress' main courtyard to attend the Teacher's flogging, that the commanding officer recalled my words about the strange celestial event I predicted for the morning and linked them to the woman's mysterious "dream." It seems all that had influenced Pontius—and not a little.

Perhaps for that reason, following his reading of the letter, the governor addressed the multitude again, questioning them in a tremulous voice.

"Why do you want to crucify him? What harm has he done to you?"

¹ Although I did not meet Claudia Procula or Procla during the Trojan Horse Project's first "grand journey", all of our information suggested that this woman was "distinguished" and had possibly descended (according to Tacitus) from the branch of the Procula which belonged to the equestrian class as did Pontius. They were very well known. Titius Proculus was a friend of Sulla; Cevario Proculus conspired against Nero; Licinius Proculus was a servant of Otho and a *praefectus praetorio*; and Volusius Proculus commanded Messina's fleet. One of the reports was that Proculus was a descendent of the Claudians and was a native of Gaul, and perhaps distantly related to Tiberius by marriage. If this is true, it could explain why Caligula banished Pontius Pilate to Gaul after Tiberius died [Major's note].

The priests immediately perceived a growing weakness in Caesar's representative and they savaged him.

"Crucify him! Crucify him!" they shouted relentlessly.

The Jews' paroxysm reached such an extreme that Pilate's next question was barely heard.

"Who wants to testify against him?"

The crowd only repeated a single phrase: "Crucify him!"

In view of this tumult, Civilis drew his sword and raised it above his helmet. He was ready to give the signal for his men to take action, but Pilate forced the centurion to put away his weapon. He waved the palms of his hands asking for silence. Gradually the fanatics were recovering their composure. The governor ignored the people's previous petitions and repeated his question.

"I ask you once again to tell me which prisoner you wish to free on this day of Passover."

The response was equally blunt and monolithic: "Give us Barabbas!"

Pilate silently shook his head as an indication of his disapproval.

"If I release Barabbas the murderer, what can I do with Jesus?" he insisted.

This new revelation of insecurity on the governor's part was met by a brutal outbreak of violence. And the phrase "Crucify him!" rose like thunder. The mob raised their fists in the air clamoring louder and louder.

"Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!"

This vociferousness impressed Pontius so much that he was frightened. He withdrew from the balcony and disappeared inside his residence. One of the officers followed Civilis' orders and hurried after Pilate. Soon, while the crowd was possessed by the idea of killing the Teacher, and continued its dismal request for a crucifixion, the centurion who had gone after the governor reappeared in the entrance to the praetorium passing a tragic directive to Civilis.

The commanding centurion nodded his head and raised his arms in a gesture of authority that demanded silence. The crowd obeyed aware of this foreigner's power and extreme harshness. Once it was quiet, Civilis delivered some brief but dramatic words that froze Joseph's and John's hearts.

"This is the order: 'The prisoner will be flogged.'"

With the most absolute contempt, he turned on his heels and signaled for his men to lead the prisoner inside the praetorium. Without stopping to think, I lunged after Civilis joining the escort as they were already crossing the hall in the residence. It was half past ten in the morning by the *cradle's* clocks. This time John Zebedee did not accompany the Teacher and this deeply pleased me. The spectacle that was about to be presented would have ended with him losing his morale.

We turned by the staircase on the right and traversed a long, humid passage, dimly lit by some oil lamps with flames that flickered as the escort passed. The centurion was visibly disgusted at the course events were taking; he regretted the governor's weakness. If it had depended upon him, the trial against this Galilean would have ended without contemplation.

"Between this visionary and a Zealot murderer," he assured me as we covered the final meters of the passageway, "Rome would not have hesitated and much less so, when that bunch of snakes has the audacity to challenge the Caesar's authority."

Once we exited the tunnel, I immediately recognized the arcaded courtyard we had crossed on Wednesday morning when Joseph and I were on our way to the interview with Pontius. This courtyard was accessible from the hall in the praetorium and from the arched tunnel at the fortress' west entrance simply by travelling through this passage which was less than fifty meters long. I discovered it exited onto the northeast corner of the courtyard to the right of the marble staircase that led to Pilate's oval office.

Soldiers arrived at the center of the courtyard and lingered next to the circular fountain dedicated to the Roman goddess. They seemed to be following a common custom. The centurion advised those who were resting that the horses must be moved. As the cavalry proceeded to loosen the reigns, assorted tens of infantry who were off duty came over. News of the imminent flogging of a Jew who considered himself the "king" of the Hebrews had quickly spread throughout the garrison, which naturally did not wish to miss the event. Civilis suggested I depart.

"Pontius wants a punishment...a special one," the centurion added with a sarcastic smile, "and by Zeus he is going to have it."

The officer's words made me tremble. I looked at Jesus, but the giant remained motionless and distant. He was staring at the jet of water that spurted from the small sphere the goddess held in her left hand. The sound of the horses' hooves as they were led away to the far corners of the site marked the beginning of the torture. Two especially husky mercenaries had been given the detail. Both of them held *flagra* or short whips about thirty centimeters long with handles made from rawhide and metal. One whip was divided into three thongs, which were 40 or 50 centimeters long and equipped with pairs of *tali* or sheep's anklebones at their tips.

The other scourge caressed the iron rings with the weighted thongs, which had a pair of metal balls (possibly lead) attached to the ends of the two rawhide strips. At a signal from the leading officer, two of the soldiers in the escort positioned the Teacher in front of one of the four columns or small hitching posts about forty centimeters tall which surrounded the fountain and were used to fasten the reigns from the horses. A soldier tried to untie Jesus' wrists, but they had been done in such a way that after various futile attempts, he used his sword and cut the rope with a single slash. After being tied behind his back for almost eight hours, Jesus' hands were swollen and a shade of violet.

Once these were freed, they removed his purple cloak that Herod Antipas had tied around his neck and disposed of his roomy mantle. With the same violence, they stripped off his tunic. The Teacher's garments fell into one of the puddles of horse urine. Finally they untied his sandals and took them off. The same soldier who had cut the rope, bound Jesus' wrists in front of him with the rope he had just cut open.

Jesus let them do this with total and absolute docility. He had started to sweat. This reaction from his body put me on alert. The ambient temperature was much less than the high temperatures necessary to cause sudden perspiration. I walked in front of him in a small circle, confirming that his face, neck, and sides had become wet.

At that moment, I regretted not having infrared vision contact lens implants. Judging from the way the pulsation of his carotid arteries accelerated more and more, and by his successive deep inhalations, the Rabbi had begun to experience a new elevated heart rate. The Nazarene was perfectly aware of what awaited him and his body was reacted as any individual would.

From the first blow, the mercenary forced him to lean toward the stone post and hold on to the cord in the metallic ring atop the small column. The combination of the Galilean's great height and the short post meant that he had to stand with his legs apart and adopt a posture that was very difficult to maintain. His hair had fallen over his face, completely hiding his features.

For my part, I was glad I was unable to see his face...He was sweating even more heavily, which turned his torso and wide back into a shiny surface. Suddenly one of his floggers stepped forward, grabbed Jesus' loincloth snatching it off in a single brusque pull that left him completely nude. When the ribbon that held the loincloth ripped, it caused a quick intense pain in Jesus' genitals. His body shuddered and his knees buckled for the first time.

On seeing him naked, the barracks exploded in general guffaws. But the jeering cleared up when Pontius arrived. Without any preamble, the governor ordered the scourges to continue. In the midst of an expectant silence the tallest man who stood to the right of the Teacher, raised his tri-colored flagrum and launched it in a terrifying lash above Jesus' back. At the same time he sang the count of the first blow.

“Unus!”

The salvo was so brutal that the prisoner's knees doubled, nailing him into the limestone paving with a dry sound. Nonetheless, the Galilean stood up again in a reflexive motion and the second scourge released a new blow with his bifid flagrum.

“Duo!”

“Tres!”

“Quattour!”

These soldiers were consummate professionals who wielded the whips by simply flicking their wrists. This way the thongs curled, rippled, and attained the maximum effect with minimal effort.

“Quinque!”

For the initial few minutes, the rattle of the little bones and the metal balls colliding between hits were the only perceptible sound. Jesus was totally bent over, but not a single groan had escaped from him. The astragalus and the pieces of lead struck his back, carrying away pieces

of his skin. From the first blow, trickles of blood started running down his body, gliding over his sides and dripping on the pavement.

I suspected the Teacher's skin was left in an extremely fragile state after the bloody sweat phenomena. And this rain of blows was not long in breaking it, transforming his shoulders, back, and waist into a butcher's shop. Gradually with each whistle of the flagrum the ankle bones and the balls penetrated his skin causing an ablation or separation that tore the tissue around his muscles, pulling out veins and nerves.

"Triginta!"

When they reached lash number thirty, the prisoner collapsed. He stayed on his knees with his fingers tenaciously holding on to the column's metal ring. His back, shoulders and lumbar region were visibly covered with puddles of blood and innumerable bluish hematomas as fat as hen's eggs. The thongs had drawn tens of wine-colored grooves—which were similar to scratches. The presence of this multitude of hematomas, some of which had begun to pop, caused me to infer that the pain Jesus of Nazareth endured during the earliest minutes must have been a genuine paroxysm. But, fortunately for him, the lashes were discharged with such vicious precision that many of the hematomas opened, turning his back into a river of blood, which lessened the pain to a certain extent.

"Quadráginta!"

The fortieth crack of the whip arrived four or five minutes after the torment began. Yet the Nazarene's body was far from shuddering as it had in response to the first blows, now he did not react. Civilis raised his grapevine pole interrupting the flogging. One of the sweaty flagellators threw himself on the prisoner and pulled his hair. Once he confirmed that Jesus was inert, he dropped his head so that it landed in the hollow formed by the Nazarene's arms.

The centurion harried his men. A soldier filled a bucket with water from the fountain and threw it on the back of the Nazarene's neck. Jesus' head moved slightly on contact with the water, while its force swept part of the blood that had dripped on the ground away. From that second, the post, a wide strip of the low wall around the fountain, and the scourges' arms, tunics, and faces appeared to be dyed red. The widespread bleeding from his back and the area around his kidneys had started to worry me.

Although the ordeal had stopped at lash number forty, which accidentally coincided with the Judaic prescription for flogging¹, it was Pilate's will that the carnage continue. He stood silently nearby : impassive. The floggers took advantage of this brief intermission to bend over the fountain, refresh their faces with splashes of water, and scrub their arms as they tried to clean away the bloodstains. Even though the floggers knew Latin, from the tenor of their sparse but abundant beards, I was almost sure the mercenaries were Syrians or Samaritans. The Romans generally assigned them to the task when the condemned was Jewish. Their ancestral hatred for the Hebrews made them exemplary executors...

¹ Jewish law establishes a total of forty lashed minus one as punishment by flogging. (It is also written that, according to R. Yehuda, 'at the number 40 the additional one will be the fortieth.) The prisoner was whipped with his hands tied to a post. The servant at the synagogue stripped off his clothes and if they tore, they tore, and they were destroyed until his chest was uncovered. The servant at the synagogue was to hold a stone in his hand and wrap a calfskin strap around it; first folding it in half, then in fourths so the straps were above and beneath the stone [Major's note].

The Teacher had recovered. One of the scourges tried to lift him up by his armpits. But the weight was excessive so he asked for help. When at last they succeeded in keeping him upright, a soldier who was holding a brass ladle, stood in front of the Nazarene while one of the floggers yanked his hair back without a second thought, forcing Jesus' to raise his face. Then they held it there until the Roman who carried the ladle emptied its contents into the Galilean's mouth.

When I asked Civilis why, he said the ladle contained salted water. Of course, the Roman army was well aware of the serious problems that could be produced by a punishment like this, especially in regards to dehydration. Although Jesus had been forced to ingest a considerable quantity of water at the Sanhedrin's headquarters, his profuse perspiration in the garden at Gethsemane and now, during the flogging, combined with the significant amount of hemorrhaging he had sustained would have dwindled his reserves or water balance and his intracellular as well as extracellular fluid levels.

At least the saltwater was a decisive reinforcement. It was as if Pontius did not really want the prisoner to die during the beating. (A danger also exists that the water would have an excessive concentration of sodium chloride—the ideal concentration would be 0.85 parts per 100—which could cause edema or soft swelling to appear in different parts of his body.) Nevertheless, Civilis' pronouncement and the governor's objective were to crush the prisoner to the limit so his pitiful state would touch and satisfy the Sadducees' aggressive spirits. Therefore, once the contents of the ladle had been drained, the centurion lifted his baton, the scourges picked up their whips, and the punishment continued.

“Unus!”

This new lash and the ones that followed were specifically directed to his thighs, legs, buttocks, abdomen, a section of his arms, and his chest. His back and waist were mostly left out. As the blows landed, the straps twisted around the Teacher's legs, forcing his muscles into extreme contractions; in particular, those situated on the front and back of his thighs were the most vulnerable. Soon the skin broke open, provoking a more intense hemorrhage than the one on his back.

“*Decem!*”

In a titanic effort to endure the pain, Jesus of Nazareth firmly held onto the iron ring at the top of the post and raised his face when it was possible. The muscles in his neck, which were as taut as a bowstring, resisted along his supraclavicular fossa which was inundated with cold sweat that ceaselessly spouted, diluting the fiery red blood.

“*Duo-de viginti!*”

The flogger sang hit number eighteen as he lashed his flagrum over the prisoner's chest. One of the tiny sheep's bones must have injured Jesus' left nipple. The intense pain activated a rapid reflexive motion: the giant stood up with all of his strength while his teeth, which were solidly clenched together, parted to emit a rending wail. This was the Rabbi's first complaint.

His pull upwards was so sudden and powerful that the rope, which tied him to the iron ring, broke and the Teacher's body fell backwards violently. This caught the floggers and the rest of the troops unawares; they backed away in fright. The Nazarene landed heavily on his back and

slid over the paving stones leaving a wide trail of blood behind. When the soldiers pounced on him and raised him to his feet with difficulty, Jesus' breathing was extremely agitated.

I utilized this moment of confusion to insert my "snake eyes" contact lenses and commence an exhaustive exploration of the damage inflicted by the flogging. I pushed the nail for the ultrasound into its deepest position at 7.51 megahertz and prepared to sweep the superficial tissues first. The soldiers had dragged the prisoner to the small post and attached him to the ring again. Then the scourges, who were very irritated by the mishap, resumed the flogging.

The strokes, each more ruthless than the previous one, were gradually humiliating the Teacher's body. He ended up doubling over his knees while his fingers, contorting from the pain, dripped with blood. Jesus had started to respond to each lash with a curt muffled moan.

Once the ultrasound waves were "converted" into images, the result of the flogging appeared before us in all of its true drama. The scourges were consummate specialists who knew very well which areas they could touch and which ones they should not. From the first moment, our attention was called to the incredible fact that none of his ribs had been fractured. Instead, the precise lashes had opened Jesus' sides so the fibrous bands or aponeuroses of the serratus posterior superior muscles were left uncovered. The pain of this injury to the rib's last protective layer reaches a threshold that it is difficult for me to imagine. The opinion of the experts at the Trojan Horse is that it was above 22 JND¹.

Of course, extensive areas of the muscles on his back such as his latissimus dorsi, infra spinatus, and deltoids had long deep furrows sown with hematomas that while not bursting, were an extraordinary strain on what remained of his skin, thus multiplying the sensation of pain. In this examination of the superficial tissues, the investigators were startled when they confirmed how the floggers had selected the most painful zones, yet those least likely to induce cardiac arrest or instantly kill the Nazarene. They primarily choose the front of his thighs, his pectoral muscles, and the regions with internal muscles, but they avoided his heart, liver, pancreas, spleen, and the major arteries in his neck.

From the first moment I switched the ultrasound frequency to 3.5 megahertz, the analysis of his internal organs revealed a considerable loss of blood. Jesus' blood volume (or total blood volume) was set to be between 6.0 and 6.5 liters. Hence, after the harshest punishment by flogging, this volume had decreased 27%. This meant the Galilean had spilt a total of around 1.6 liters of blood since he was subject to the outrages at the Sanhedrin's headquarters.

It was a significant quantity; however, it was insufficient to definitively alter a normal person either physically or psychologically. Proof of this was that Jesus of Nazareth still had the strength and mental clarity to respond to the questions they asked him after the flogging. Nonetheless, this blood loss created an increasing feeling of distress, sporadic palpitations, weakness, and above all, a suffocating thirst.

The fluctuations in his heart rate were continuous. At some of the blows, especially one of the last ones which fell directly on his testicles, it spiked to 170 beats per minute and swiftly plunged to 90 beats per minute, generating a second faint. Due to the powerful discharge of

¹ An increase of the intensity of a stimulus that causes a perceptible increase in the degree of pain is called a "just noticeable difference" (JND). A comparison of the level where the full intensity of the stimulus does not produce any pain and the most intense level of pain, determines an average of about 22 JND for the patient [Major's note].

adrenaline at that instant, his blood pressure also rose to a maximum of 210 millimeters of H₂O. In addition, the progressive depletion of his adrenaline was having a domino effect on his parasympathetic nervous system and the intermediary, acetylcholine, which accompanies it. This lowered his blood pressure at the conclusion of the torture to such an extent that he was nearly in a complete state of prostration. The analysis of his bloodstream also enabled us to confirm a fact that was evident: the successive increase of the osmotic pressure and the indices for sodium and chloride were unequivocal signs of the significant dehydration the Son of Man's body had begun to experience.

“Quadraginta!”

In reality, lash forty was actually number eighty. After the first forty, they struck a man who was practically defeated. The Teacher's body was disfigured by hematomas, literally bathed in blood and barely moving. His imperceptible moans had been extinguished. Now the only sound in the courtyard was the crack of the lashes, which nailed into his flesh, and the sound of the floggers' panting, which grew increasingly labored, as they were obviously exhausted.

For some time the Nazarene had been virtually curled into a ball with his head and part of his chest resting on his arms in a fetal position. Each stroke was slower and spaced farther and farther apart. Yet they continued to shred his buttocks, abdomen, flanks, and the sides of his legs. They even wounded the soles of his feet. Some of the soldiers who were bored or shaken by the savage beating began to leave the place and engage in their usual duties.

On observing the scourges' increasing fatigue, Civilis directed a meaningful glance at Lucilius, a gigantic centurion whom I had seen at the beating of the Roman soldier. The Pannonian understood the *primus prior's* intentions and pushed his way through the members of the cohort. He raised his arm and snatched the flagrum out of the air as the soldier on the Teacher's right lifted it before releasing the next blow. The immediate presence of this towering human gripping the triple ended whip was sufficient reason for both scourges to quit and sink—scarcely breathing—down on the courtyard's stone slabs.

Familiar with this officer's strength and cruelty, the audience of soldiers waited in silence for each and every one of this Bear's actions. Lucilius stroked the thongs, cleaning the off the blood with his fingers. Then he stood a meter from the prisoner's left side, raised his right arm and launched a precise ferocious hit on the lower part of Jesus' buttocks. The lash must have touched his coccyx because the sharp pain reactivated the Rabbi's nervous system so that he managed to stand for several seconds. Yet in the middle of a strong convulsive spasm, his muscles failed and he sank to his knees. The soldiers welcomed this studied attack with an exclamation that they would repeat at every blow.

“*Cedo alteram!*”

This time a second blow, which was directed at his left hamstring, made the Teacher moan while the mercenaries enthusiastically intoned, “*Cedo alteram!*”

The third, fourth, and fifth lashes fell on his kidneys.

“*Cedo alteram! Cedo alteram! Cedo alteram!*”

Lucilius was so violent that the sheep's anklebones were embedded in Jesus' flesh; hence, every stroke provoked a copious hemorrhage.

"Cedo alteram! Cedo alteram!"

The sixth and seventh lashes were centered on each one of Jesus' auricles. Almost instantaneously a few large drops of blood ran down both sides of his neck. The Teacher bowed his head over the metal ring and the centurion sough out his right side, emptying all of his fury on Christ's navel.

"Cedo alteram!"

The savage impact against the prisoner's belly seriously affected his already castigated diaphragm by practically cutting off his laborious respiration. This was probably the most delicate moment of the torture. For a few seconds, which seemed interminable, the Galilean's ribcage stayed motionless. Eventually his intercostal muscles reacted by alleviating the pulmonary tension.

"Cedo alteram!"

The colossus dealt the ninth hit to Jesus' torn right side and I think he launched it with the full intention of aiming for the open serratus anterior muscles in order to shoot at the prisoner's frozen respiration. The whip emitted a dry sound as though one of the anklebones had struck his ribs. The officer's momentum, which was the source of the torrent of sweat on his forehead, made Jesus' body lose its balance and fall on his left side. At that particular moment, it was very likely that another pain was affecting the Galilean's body even though it was dimmed by this atrocious ordeal.

I am referring to Jesus' bladder. It must have been overflowing, since the ureter's sphincter opened involuntarily releasing an abundant micturition. (Judging from the length of time his bladder discharged, it must have contained between 350 and 400 cubic centimeters of urine.) Although the urine was an intense yellow, fortunately it did not contain blood.

Yet this involuntary micturition only served to bring about an outburst of laughter from the Romans and a fiercer attack from Lucilius who took saw this act as a personal affront. Now in a rage, he lifted the flagrum and aimed it at the Teacher's testicles. One of the points of the whip touched the skin on his scrotum; the other two landed on the sac. In reaction to this lacerating blow, the rate of Jesus' heartbeat accelerated as he cringed and his piercing wail was intermixed with the last refrain.

"Cedo alteram!"

All at once, the Teacher paled, his blood pressure dropped below ninety and he lost consciousness. Civilis raised his rod again, commanding the soldiers to inspect the prisoner. Then he went to the governor and inquired for instructions. Should they continue the punishment? Before Pontius could reach a decision, the brutal Lucilius hinted that, given the present situation, it would be best to finish off the prisoner then and there.

Doubtful, Pilate directed his gaze over the Rabbi's inanimate bloody body, then he smiled sardonically. I shall never forget his expression. That demented man seemed to have enjoyed the vicious flogging. At last, the officer who had performed the final part of the

scourging swung his arm behind his back since he was convinced that Pontius was inclined towards the solution he had just presented. Except now Jesus' condition was so precarious that he was slow to recover consciousness after they sluiced down his head and neck with water for a second time. The Nazarene's slow recuperation swayed Pilate to proceed with his original plan. Prior to leaving the arcaded courtyard, he instructed Civilis to attend to the Galilean and bring him into his presence as soon as possible.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning. The mercenaries untied the rope and with great difficulty, positioned the prisoner so that the post used for the flogging supported his back. One of the soldiers squatted behind the pillar and tried to hold Jesus' abused body up by the shoulders. As he sat with his legs extended on the flagstones, the giant's respiration was still labored. With each sporadic breath, he shivered from an infinity of painful points. These tremors increased in intensity and frequency until I feared the Teacher had caught a fever. I was not mistaken...

Under Civilis' ever attentive vigilance, another soldier approached with a ladle and brought it to the Rabbi's lips, forcing him to drink another dose of the salted water. Some of the wounds had started to coagulate and many of the rivulets of blood began to dry up. However, the breeches in his sides continued streaming blood that fell onto the flagstones at short intervals driven by the motion of his increasingly short and rapid respiration.

The sentinel shook his head in a sign of disapproval. It was not necessary to be a doctor to conclude that the punishment had been so disproportionate that we feared for the prisoner's life. Before it was too late, I disconnected ultrasound system by pressing the second nail. Once I activated the microcomputer lodged in "Moses' staff", the flow of infrared radiation was ready for a dynamical tele-thermographic analysis¹.

¹ Based on our experience, the tele-thermographic detection of subcutaneous temperatures from a distance is possible thanks to a feature of human skin, namely its natural emission of infrared radiation or IR. According the Stefan-Boltzmann's formula ($W=\epsilon JT^4$) for a well-known law, the emission is proportional to the cutaneous temperature and since it is raised to the fourth power, small variations in this value can cause marked increases or decreases in the infrared emission. (Here the components are W: energy emitted per unit of surface area; ϵ : emission factor for the body under consideration; J: Stefan-Boltzmann's constant and T: absolute temperature.) In 1934, Hardy initiated many experiments that proved the human skin emits an infrared radiation similar to a "black body" which does not emit any of the infrared radiation incident on its surface. The infrared radiation emitted by human skin has a spectrum with an amplitude that has a maximum intensity peak at 9.6 microns. For the most part, our tele-thermographic device consisted of a machine capable of detecting the minimum intensity of infrared radiation from a distance along with an optical system that focused the IR into a detector. It was composed of semiconductor materials, principally SbIn and Ge-Hg, which emit a minimal electrical signal each time an infrared photon within a set range of wavelengths hits its surface. Although the detector was the "point" type, which is capable of perceiving the IR emitted by a single geometrical point, the Trojan Horse Project managed to widen its radius of action by means of a complex scanning system formed by miniature rotating and oscillating mirrors. The high speed scanning provided an analysis of Jesus' entire body several times a second. Consequently, it was possible to obtain dynamic images from a process called dynamic tele-thermography. Immediately after an emission, the electrical signal corresponding to the presence of an infrared photon is conducted into a miniaturized oscilloscope where it is amplified and filtered. There, thanks to the existing high voltage and the synchronization between the scanner and the detector, the generated image was stored in the computer's titanium crystal memory. Of course, our tele-thermograph established a thermal sensitivity scale (0.1, 0.2, 0.5 degrees centigrade, etc.) and a collection of a technical devices facilitated additional measurements of thermal gradients between the areas of the thermogram (i.e. isotherms, linear analysis, etc.). Two types of images were obtained. A grayscale image, which is quite adequate for studying the morphology of vessels. And a color image composed of eight to sixteen colors that is very useful for performing precise measurements of thermal differentials. Naturally, both systems could be used in a complementary manner.

As I mentioned earlier, the “rattlesnake eyes” or special contact lenses let me direct the tele-thermographic system to the desired areas so I could order and cluster the plentiful data points. The images obtained from this system were simply spectacular. The majority of Jesus’ body, which was bathed in blood, appeared a reddish brown color, while the hematomas (which were much hotter) were represented by a deep blue color.

The images allowed me to observe how the main arterial network was not damaged. However, the cutaneous vascularization and the superficial venous system sustained damage especially in extensive regions on his posterior. The Project’s doctors conjectured that the Teacher would have survived using today’s medical techniques and medicine, if he recuperated for a little more than three months.

The analysis of his retinas found them to be in a satisfactory condition. The reddish yellow color demonstrated that his vision was normal. I could not say the same for some of his articulated joints, in particular his left leg (popliteal fossa) and the ones in his shoulders which had been seriously affected by the iron balls and the sheep’s anklebones.

The dermal temperatures at his articulated joints, which were extraordinarily inflamed, had raised his temperature by three degrees centigrade. Overall, his high temperature varied between 39 and 40 degrees, which confirmed my general personal impression: Jesus had caught a fever that would not leave him until the moment he died.

This meticulous survey of the Galilean allowed us to distinguish at least 225 hot points corresponding to the places where the whip struck him. The excoriations, hematomas, and tears had produced other inflamed areas that were mostly circular. These high temperatures drew a tragic map of the lashes and formed a “guide” to the flogging, which was detailed by the module’s main computer as follows: shoulders and back: 54 impacts; waist and kidneys: 29; abdomen: 6; chest: 14; right leg (posterior zone): 18; left leg (posterior): 22; right leg (frontal): 19; left leg (frontal): 11 impacts; right arm (frontal and posterior) 20; left arm (frontal and posterior): 14; ears : one impact on each ear; testicles: 2; and buttocks: 14 impacts.

To this destruction, add an endless number of “scratches” or grooves made by the thongs of the whips. The scorpionic points of the metal balls and the anklebones produced the vast majority of lesions three centimeters long with a peculiar barbell shape. In summary, it was such a brutal punishment that none of the experts at the Trojan Horse Project could ever comprehend how a man had been able to endure it.

After numerous tests, the Trojan Horse Project selected the AGA-661 machine in association with the Barnes pyroscan and the CSF-IR-815 as the most suitable equipment for our mission [Major’s note].

UNTITLED IV

“That’s enough! Stand him up and dress him.”

The officer’s voice resounded with heavy impatience. While the infantrymen pulled Jesus around, I disconnected the circuits in “Moses’ staff” and put away the contact lenses. It took two mercenaries to prop up the Teacher’s battered body so he could recover in a vertical position. His extreme weakness caused his knees to double, forcing the soldiers to hold him up by his armpits. Other Romans, who came in response to Civilis’ orders, assisted their colleagues in keeping the prisoner from collapsing on the flagstones.

As they hoisted him up, some of the wounds—especially those on his sides—were bubbling and gushing streams of blood rapidly over his abdomen, groin, thighs, and legs until it poured onto the flagstones. Someone picked up his clothes. After he was swathed in his tunic, the mantle was placed on his left shoulder and wrapped around his chest. Jesus’ clothes were securely fastened to his chest and back so that they—together with the tunic—acted as a bandage. The Romans knew this was an excellent way to staunch many of the breeches and cut off part of the hemorrhage.

I shuddered when I imagined what would occur the moment the Galilean was deprived of his garments. If the clots were glued to the fabric—as they must be—removing the tunic would produce a new and painful ordeal resulting in the reopening of his wounds. The white tunic soaked up the blood immediately; then drops of blood fell from its sleeves and hem. The absorbent material was visibly stained red by the anarchic outcry of countless reddish rings.

The soldiers forced the Nazarene to take some steps on his own, but he barely dragged his bare feet along the paving, when his strength abandoned him and he crumpled. A quick intervention by Civilis’ soldiers prevented him from falling to the ground. The group gave the centurion a questioning look. Now discouraged, Civilis directed his men to sit Jesus on one of the wooden benches in the arcade. Civilis understood that for the moment, it was useless to lead the prisoner to the balcony where the governor awaited, since it was absolutely necessary for several soldiers to accompany him just to hold him upright.

The feverish tremors continued shaking the Nazarene’s body which the Romans had guided, little by little and step by step, to one of the seats located on the east side of the courtyard. Meanwhile, others began cleaning the flagstones and the post where the flogging occurred. The horses returned to the fountain; their caretakers resumed grooming them and scrubbing their backs with bunches of pennyroyal, which according to popular folklore, killed lice. The centurion took off his helmet, and, after reflecting for a few seconds, departed from the courtyard in the direction of the tunnel leading to the praetorium.

I must mention that my observation of the Teacher hobbling along confirmed that the visible limp in his left leg was produced by the crack of Lucilius’ whip on the Jesus’ hamstring had altered the articulation of his knee. (Much later, this would be verified when I examined the tele-thermograph.) At last, Jesus was sitting on one of the benches. In doing so, a new rictus of pain was outlined on his face. It is possible this grimace was caused by the blows to his coccyx or kidneys. Once he leaned on the wood, the bone at the base of his spine must have been in contact with the back of the bench and the seat, respectively.

For several minutes the troops' attitude was tranquil, even proper. Two of them stayed next to the Nazarene waiting for him to rest and recuperate. Meanwhile, the others joined one of the huddles which were shouting from the corner of the courtyard. On seeing the Teacher was somewhat more composed, I could not resist the temptation to join them.

I drew near the circle of mercenaries who sat or crouched down with their attention centered on a single flagstone in the pavement. Once I looked over the soldiers' heads, I could see they were playing a game which was a variation of "three in a row" described by Plutarch. The members of the garrison used their swords to draw a circle on one of the paving stones and etch a series of rough figures and letters inside the circle. I identified a "B" which stood for the "King of the Game" or "Basileus" in Greek and a royal crown. All of these figures were separated from one another by a zigzag line inside the circle.

The participants threw four anklebones, which were previously marked with letters and ciphers, over the circle as they sang out different plays according to the letters or figures they predicted the anklebones would fall upon. Gradually the game grew animated and several of the Romans cheered on other players' by name, crying out "Alexander", "Darius" and "Adonis". In the end a player who had the fortune to roll one of the tiny bones very close to the crown, shouted "throw the king" which is the equivalent to our "checkmate", so that was the end of the entertainment.

The soldiers picked up the anklebones and the man who had won, surely influenced by that last stroke of luck, noticed the Galilean and urged his colleagues to continue the game, "but this time with a real king..." This idea was welcomed enthusiastically and the group advanced to toward the bench ready to amuse themselves at the expense of the one who had proclaimed himself "King of the damned and hated Hebrews." The fact that Civilis was absent made some of the men guarding Jesus hesitate, however they soon joined their companions in the jokes and vulgar insults.

All of a sudden, ten mercenaries who were bored and unoccupied stood aside to let two infantrymen pass through. With a martial air and barely containing their laughter, these two soldiers approached the Nazarene, who had his head lowered again as he bore this new and painful predicament with his usual silence. One of the soldiers who had started to march toward the prisoner carried something in his hands, which at first sight looked like an upside down willow basket.

It was not a basket, but a complicated braided "helmet" with a base of spiny thorns; it had the shape of half an orange with a ring or support at its base which was made from a bundle of green reeds that were perfectly woven together with other roots that were also from the rush. From what I could see, spiny skullcap had been interwoven with approximately half a dozen very pliable branches out of which protruded a terrifying swarm of erect thorns shaped like parrot beaks with sizes that ranged between 20 millimeters and 6 centimeters¹.

¹ In my first visual inspection, I recognized the thorns as the ones from the plant called *poterium spinosum*, which is prevalent in Palestine and commonly used as fuel for fires. Doctor Ha-Reubeni who was the director of the Botanical Museum at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem confirmed this hypothesis. Thereby discrediting many other theories about the possible origin of the plant used to plait a "helmet" of thorns. The most popular and well known accounts mention ziziphus or spina Christi (*palinurus aculeatus*) as the bramble used in this coronation [Major's note].

Clearly, while the majority of the soldiers were focusing their attention on mocking Jesus, these two individuals had entered some of the fortress' storerooms for firewood obsessed with the sinister idea of weaving a crown for the "King of the Jews." This act was received with applause and boisterous laughter. The one carrying the dangerous "helmet" of thin brownish bent branches feigned a reverential bow. Then he lifted the crown half a meter above the Teacher's cranium and lowered it violently so that it embedded in the Rabbi's head.

The howl of satisfaction that escaped the soldiers' throats drowned out Jesus' moan. Upon contact with the thorns, he raised his head and unintentionally struck his occipital region against the wall behind the semi-detached bench. This collision with the wall must have sunk the thorns located in the back of his head sink still further into the posterior area of his cranium.

The helmet had a brutal fit; it covered nearly all of the prisoner's head. The ring that supported the spiny network of was almost level with his nose, which also made it difficult for the Teacher to see. The acute pain from the 20 or 30 spines that punctured his scalp, forehead, temples, ears, and part of his cheeks stunned the Son of Man again. In a protective reflexive reaction, he closed his eyes for several seconds and kept his mouth half-opened as he tried to breathe in the maximum amount of air.

Six copious streams of blood appeared on his forehead and temples. I feared that the spikes had perforated the facial vein, which runs from the chin to the ocular zone. I came as close as I could to his face, yet I could not distinguish a thorn stuck in the area across the vein. Instead, others had pierced his forehead and right malar region. A hook shaped thorn had penetrated his skin a few centimeters from his left eyebrow (in the orbicularis oculi muscle) where it initiated heavy bleeding that quickly covered his brow, flooding his left eye, cheek, and beard with blood.

The profuse emission of blood indicated the spines had seriously affected the epicranial aponeurosis, which is located immediately beneath the scalp. I noted that the retraction of the broken veins from this extremely vascularized area would be prompt. The blood began to flow abundantly, dropping incessantly from his beard to his chest.

However, the soldiers who were not content with this barbaric deed went in search of the purple mantle, which was still on the flagstones, and tossed it over his shoulders. Another one of the mercenaries put a reed in Jesus' hand and knelt down before him.

"Hail the King of the Jews!" he exclaimed during the general hilarity.

The repeated bows, imprecations, spit, and kicks to the Nazarene's shins amused the mob that was increasingly entertained by its insults. A soldier asked leave to come through, then he positioned his buttocks scarcely centimeters from Jesus' face, lifted his tunic, and commenced breaking wind obstreperously. This provoked new hurtful guffaws.

The soldiers' spree was abruptly cut short by the presence of the giant Lucilius who was no doubt attracted to the scene by the men's constant commotion. He silently surveyed the tableau and, with a smile of complicity, stood in front of the prisoner. Intrigued, the infantrymen kept quiet. Next, the centurion raised his *sporrarm* and started to urinate on Jesus of Nazareth's legs, chest, and face.

This new insult pulled the Romans into resounding and collective roars of laughter, which were prolonged even until after the officer had concluded his micturition. My heart then felt as wounded and overwhelmed as if these offenses had been committed against my own

person. I leaned abjectly against the wall of the arcade with only one wish: to see Civilis appear. For once my wish was fulfilled.

The commander of the auxiliary forces made his entrance into the center of the courtyard of Antonia's Fortress at the exact moment that one of the heartless soldiers snatched the cane out of the Nazarene's hands and used it to give him a hard thump on top of his helmet of thorns. The mercenaries' snickers instantly disappeared at Civilis' precipitous arrival.

When the centurion tried to make them responsible for their companions by asking the guards about this new taunting, they shrugged their shoulders. Their peers had scattered among the pillars and throughout the courtyard. Visibly disgusted by his men's lack of discipline, the officer ordered the soldiers to set the condemned man on his feet and follow him. And so they did.

Although Jesus of Nazareth was somewhat more revived, he was subject to constant chills. He started to walk towards the tunnel practically dragging his left leg. The three soldiers who hovered beside the Galilean and advanced with him would not leave the prisoner until the moment he returned to the site of the flogging.

It was 11:15 am. As the sun rose higher, it illuminated Jesus' giant figure leaving the praetorium. Inevitably, a murmur of surprise escaped from the crowd waiting in front of the staircase, when they saw the prisoner's deplorable appearance. His escort halted in the middle of the terrace to the left of the window where Pontius waited. As soon as he saw the helmet of thorns on the Teacher's head, he turned to Civilis in nervous indignation, pointed his index finger at the Rabbi's head, and asked him about it. I do not know what the centurion said to him. My attention was still fixed on the Galilean.

As Jesus paused before the multitude, he stooped and interlaced his fingers as he attempted to control the intense shivering that consumed him even in the presence of the sun's warmth. Slowly, as if trying to absorb its gentle caressing rays, he raised his face to the sun until it was directly opposite the solar disc. For a few seconds the deep dark circles under his eyes and the waterfall of blood that obscured his face were perfectly visible to all. However, when he lifted his head the thorns shifted and pulled out of the back of his head only to stab him again in the nape of his neck. So the pain forced him to lower his face.

John Zebedee, paralyzed before his Teacher's tragic change, finally reacted by releasing Joseph of Arimathea's arm and rushing to Jesus where he then knelt crying at the Rabbi's feet. The soldiers glanced inquiringly at the centurion. They were ready to take away the defendant's best friend, but Civilis extended his left hand to indicate that they leave him alone. For several minutes, both Pilate and crowd looked on in awe at the man sobbing disconsolately. A respectful silence reigned in the courtyard.

The Teacher made two attempts to bend down to John and bring his trembling bloody hands toward his beloved disciple, but the spine trap and the stiff improvised bandage impeded him. The disciple's valiant gesture and the Nazarene's broken appearance undoubtedly touched the governor. Rising from his chair, he took a few short steps to the edge of the staircase, then he pointed to Jesus.

"Here you have your man. Again I declare that I have not found him guilty of any crime," he announced without losing sight of Caiaphas and the Sadducees in his effort to move the accusers to pity. "After punishing him, I want to give him his freedom."

Once again Pilate made a mistake. Although the crowd did not dare to reply, the high priests and his supporters responded by intoning the familiar phrase: “Crucify him!”

The crowd progressively joined the Sanhedrin in their pitiless chorus, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Disappointed, Pontius returned to the tribunal and waited for the people to calm down. The wind, increasingly warm and uncomfortable, began to raise large whirlwinds of dust that it dragged from the East. It lashed the north wing of Antonia’s Tower with growing force. Civilis immediately caught this atmospheric change. After he confirmed that the sentinels on watch in the fortified tower had taken refuge from the gusts of wind, he stared at me with a stern expression that reminded me of the prediction I had made that morning. I agreed with a nod.

However, the governor’s voice interrupted our silent dialog. Once the mob was calm, Pontius addressed the Hebrews with an unmistakable tinge of dismay in his words, while flattening his toupée, which was exceedingly compromised by the incipient sirocco, with his right hand.

“I perfectly recognize that you have decided to kill this man. But what has he done to deserve his sentence? Who wants to declare his crime?”

Flushed with rage, Caiaphas mounted the stairs. After spitting on Jesus, he faced the governor.

“We have a sacred law which says that this man must die. He himself has declared himself to be the Son of God—blessed be his name!” he shouted. And turning his head toward the crestfallen defendant, he spit on him again.

Pontius eyed Jesus with a sudden fear. Blood was still dripping from his forehead to stain John’s mantle. Yet as he knelt embracing the Teacher’s feet, it seemed he was not paying attention to anything that was happening. With resolute steps, Caiaphas returned to the front of the crowd and Pontius, now pale with his hair disheveled, struck the chair with both of his palms, ordering Civilis to bring the Galilean inside his residence.

The infantrymen turned the Rabbi around and led him into the hall again. On impulse, I bent over John and encouraged him to stand up and stop wailing. Then I passed my arm around his shoulders, pressed his face against my chest and brought him inside the praetorium. Pilate had begun to pace in the middle of the vestibule with his hands behind his back. Meanwhile, Civilis and the other soldiers waited a short distance from the door. On seeing me, the governor interrupted his nervous pacing and advanced towards me.

“Jason, do you think it is true that this Galilean may be a god descended to Earth like the gods from Mount Olympus?” he inquired in a low voice as if he were afraid they would hear him.

The Roman’s eyes glittered and he shook, seized by a superstitious fear, which was, in my opinion, becoming even deeper. Nonetheless, Pontius did not wait for my possible reply. He smoothed his toupée, then turned around and drew near the Teacher. He posed his questions in a quavering voice.

“Where do you come from? Who are you really? Why do they say you are the Son of God?”

The Nazarene raised his head slightly, directing a gaze full of pity over his weak judge who was mentally ill and corralled by his doubts. Yet Jesus’ trembling lips did not manage to articulate a single word.

“Why do you refuse to answer?” Pontius insisted, as he grew increasingly upset, “Don’t you understand that I still have enough power to release you or crucify you?”

On hearing this menacing warning, the Galilean finally replied in a faint voice, “You would not have power over me without permission from above.”

The Teacher’s extreme weakness meant his words were very faint when they arrived at the governor’s ears. So he came as close as possible to the dried reddish blood clots that were still caught in Jesus’ mustache and beard and asked him to repeat himself.

“What did you say?”

“You cannot exercise any authority over the Son of Man,” with an effort Jesus added, “unless the heavenly father consents.”

Pontius jerked back, his eyes were bulging with confusion, but the Nazarene was not finished.

“However, you are not entirely to blame, since you are ignorant of the gospel. Those who betrayed me and delivered me to you have committed the greatest sin.”

The Roman knew whom the defendant was referring to and this unexpected confession discharged Pontius from some of his responsibility and appeared to relieve him considerably. The governor forgot about his questions. A slight smile of gratitude was outlined on his face as he left for the balcony. The escort was ready to follow him, but the Nazarene only walked to John. Placing his hand on the disciple’s head, he made a final request.

“John, you cannot do anything for me...Go to my mother and bring her to see me before I die.”

Civilis also heard these painful words, sensing the fatal denouement, he urged John Zebedee to fulfill the Galilean’s last wish without wasting any time. Concealing my own anguish, I released the disciple and nodded my head in agreement with the centurion’s noble counsel. John crossed the praetorium’s threshold and was lost in the multitude. The officer had previously directed one of his men to accompany the apostle to the rampart and assist him in clearing a way through the passage.

When Pontius returned to the terrace, he was very encouraged by the prisoner’s recent words as he began to address the crowd. His tone of voice indicated a firm desire to free Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea’s face was illuminated with hope again. Even Judas, who was one of the few who had not joined in the shouts for crucifixion seemed reassured by the governor’s determined attitude.

“I am convinced this man is only guilty of a religion and must not be detained and subjugated under our laws. Why do you expect him to be sentenced to death, because it conflicts with your traditions?”

This unexpected change in the Roman governor exasperated the Sadducees who formed a huddle and had a heated argument. Supremely contented with the prevailing tension among the priests, Pilate sat down in his portable chair and winked at Civilis. But before he could finish savoring this ephemeral triumph, Caiaphas who was pale, with bloodshot eyes, climbed the stairs again, threatening Pontius with his left hand.

“If you free this man, you are not Caesar’s friend!” he let loose.

The high priest’s wrath was so extreme that his prodigious belly rose and fell with his agitated respiration. Caiaphas’ denouncement made Pontius go pale.

“And I will use all means to ensure that emperor will learn about this,” Annas’ astute son-in-law clinched it.

Realizing that the governor knew about the wave of accusations, arrests, and executions that had sifted through the empire in the last several months, Caiaphas’ fulminating ultimatum conclusively disarmed Pilate. Undoubtedly, this was a low blow. Tiberius, and more specifically the fearsome Sejanus, had noted the two revolts that were provoked by Pilate’s intransigent stance (the first was motivated by the placement of the Emperor’s emblems and insignia in the center of Jerusalem, the second by the expropriation of the Temple’s treasury for the construction of an aqueduct); both ordeals had earned him warnings.

If the inflexible general of the Praetorian Guard, who occupied the position of Caesar, received disturbing news about the conduct of his trusted man in this province, Pontius’ political career could experience a serious reversal. In fact, a short time after Jesus’ death, Pontius fell into a new political error, which precipitated his end¹.

Moreover, the high priest had intentionally referred to Pontius’ title as “a friend of Caesar.” This reference humbled the Roman judge’s will even further. (Although Pontius Pilate was undeniably a well-known friend of Tiberius, Caiaphas’ allusion carried dynamite. The chief high priest was aware that the governor was a member of the “equestrian class” with the ostentatious title “illustrious equal”. Hence, to apply the exalted phrase “friend of Caesar” was a very special distinction.

It was exactly this privilege that made the situation even more delicate from the perspective of the Empire’s dome. The Sanhedrin had the means to reach Sejanus and Tiberius on

¹ A few years after Christ’s death, numerous Samaritans congregated around a supposed Messiah who promised to find some sacred vessels buried by Moses on one of the mountains in Samaria. Pilate knew they were going to hold a mass meeting on Mount Gerizim, so he had his troops surround the Samaritans. Then he ordered them to charge, which resulted in a great slaughter. The Jews and the Samaritans went to Vitellius who was the supreme governor of the province of Syria, accusing Pilate of the horrible murder of thousands of Samaritans. Vitellius did not have the authority to judge the governor of Judea; therefore, he sent them to Rome to appear before the Emperor. However, Tiberius died during their journey and then Cayo, alias “Caligula” took charge of the empire. Once he knew the facts, he exiled Pontius and his family to Gaul where Pilate subsequently died. (Some translators indicate that Pilate ended up taking refuge in what is known today as Lausanne in Switzerland where he committed suicide) [Major’s note].

the island of Capri with their complaints about what they considered to be Caesar's representative's newest irregularity. And Pontius apprehended this fact.)

In my opinion, it was this cunning maneuver, which finally so demoralized Pontius who was devoid of a strict sense of justice and time for cool reflection, that he gave up. Confused, embarrassed, and out of control, he rose from his curule chair and pointed to Jesus.

"Behold your King!" he proclaimed sarcastically.

Caiaaphas and the Hebrews knowing they had just struck the deathblow to the Roman's propositions incited the crowd once more.

"Put an end to him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" the crowd rejoined to Pilate.

The governor dropped back into his chair and almost without strength he cried, "Shall I crucify your King?"

One of the Sadducees stood on the second step and pointed to the front of the praetorium and yelled, "We have no king besides Caesar!"

Pilate was conscious of the hypocritical nature of this declaration, yet he dared not respond. He summoned Civilis. After Caser exchanged a few words with his first officer, he announced his intention to free Barabbas to the Jews. The mob applauded the governor's decision.

Indifferent to this recognition, Pontius asked for a basin of water. On hearing Pontius' request, the centurion looked surprised, but he obeyed, ordering one of the soldiers to make haste and fulfill the governor's request. I think that with the exception of Pilate and I, no one present knew why the Roman wanted the receptacle. Jesus silently witnessed the final part of the dialectical debate between Caesar's representative and the Hebrews with his head bowed and victimized by fever. When the soldier returned to the terrace, carrying a wide earthenware pot filled with water, he stood in front of Pontius and waited.

The governor submerged his plump hands into the container and rubbed them for a few seconds. Before the astonished eyes of the multitude, he dismissed the soldier. He raised his arms above his head and shouted so everyone could hear him.

"I am innocent of this man's blood! Are you determined to kill him? Very well, as for me: I do not find him guilty."

The people applauded again, while listening to the voice of another Sanhedrin.

"His blood will fall on us and on our children!"

The crowd chanted this tragic sentence as one man, ignorant of the dreadful hours they would endure in the holy city forty years later when the blood of many of these same Hebrews and their children would be spilt by Titus and the Roman legions. Although at first this self-justification on the part of the Sadducees and the general populace seemed to be a simple emotional manifestation typical of moments of blind hatred, the truth is this statement contained a much more profound and transcendental meaning. The judges, who were as ignorant as this

uneducated vehement mass of humanity about what was going to happen next, knew very well what the Mosaic Law said concerning this.

The Fourth Order of the Mishnah specifies that “in trials pertaining to capital punishment should one bear false witness, the defendant’s blood and the blood of all of the defendant’s descendants would hang over them until the end of the world.” The text for another Judaic tradition also states that for “whomever destroys a single life in Israel, to the scripture it will be as if he or she had killed everyone in the world as the people living in Israel were equivalent to the population of the whole world.” Hence, the Sanhedrin were fully cognizant of the significance and the gravity of their wish when they invited Jesus’ blood to fall over their descendants.

Pilate dried his hands with the lower part of his mantle. Then he turning his back to the crowd and Caiaphas, he saluted the Nazarene with his arm raised high. He immediately walked toward the door to the praetorium, as he did so; he turned his face to Civilis.

“Take care of him,” he said.

Presently the legionnaires, with the centurion in the lead, followed in the prefect’s steps as he withdrew from the terrace. His fate had been cast. From that instant, events occurred in the midst of a great confusion. I did not lose sight of John Zebedee, Joseph of Arimathea and, of course, all of the Teacher’s followers and sympathizers. It was only after I left Antonia’s fortress and interviewed the estimable Joseph again, did I establish what had transpired during Judas Iscariot’s decisive visit to the Sanhedrin’s headquarters. I say “decisive” since I would have the opportunity to report that the circumstances which surrounded and then cornered the traitor were more complex and extensive than the evangelists described.

The guard that circled Jesus set out again on the path through the tunnel, which opened onto the arcaded courtyard. To my surprise, I found Pilate was present when the soldiers paused next to the fountain. The governor was in a hurry to end this bothersome affair, so he urged Civilis to transfer the prisoner to the site of the execution at once. Evidently, after the public defeat the governor suffered in front of the Sanhedrin’s dignitaries, his intention to return to Caesarea had become a little more than an obsession. Pilate was aware that he had just committed an outrage and he did not have the courage to even look at Jesus.

The centurion exchanged impressions with several of his officers, at last he designated Longinus, a veteran soldier and native of Tusculum, a city nestled in the Alban Hills, and a fellow countryman and friend of the former senator for the Emperor Augustus, Sulpicius Quirinius¹. Longinus had fought beside this legate in the war against the Homonadenses, a rebellious tribe that inhabited the Taurus Mountains in present day Asia Minor.

Judging from his manner, he was a direct man with a hot gaze, who was frugal with his words and well acquainted with these people and their land. At that time—thanks to his bravery and apparent honesty—he had reached the grade of *quartus princeps* or centurion of the second century, of the second posterior manipule of the fourth cohort. From his age—which was possibly

¹ This famous governor “Quirino” is mentioned throughout Roman writings. He played a role in the implementation of Augustus’ orders, since he was responsible for the two censuses conducted under Caesar’s mandate in the Roman province of Syria. The first of these censuses took place between 7 AD and 10 AD and were precisely the ones that mobilized Joseph and Mary in the direction of Bethlehem. The second census occurred between 6 AD and 7 AD. On the second occasion, Sulpicius Quirinius or Quirino was sent from Rome accompanied by Coponius, who was the first prefect of Judea [Major’s note].

around 55 or 60 years old—he must have been on the verge of retiring from the service. His hair already had many grey strands and a deep scar ran from his right eyebrow to his cheekbone, without a doubt it was the result of a battle from his youth.

In my opinion, Civilis was extremely wise in his choice of Longinus as the captain responsible for the escort that would accompany the Teacher to Golgotha. For a moment I shuddered at the possibility of such a assignment falling to the cruel Lucilius, alias “Give Him Another.” In total, he appointed four soldiers and an *optio* or sub officer as the escort responsible for the prisoner’s custody and subsequent execution. My astonishment was considerable when I established that the *optio* or Longinus’ deputy was definitely Arsenius, the same Roman who had directed the Nazarene’s capture at the foot of Mount Olivet.

Everything seemed decided. Longinus entrusted one of his men to proceed with measuring the prisoners’ spans while another soldier walked to the guard post at the west entrance in search of an object whose name I did not manage to hear. Now Pilate was on the point of leaving when Civilis, who had just consulted with the man responsible for the platoon that would escort Jesus, suggested something that, in principle, had not been foreseen. Why not use this opportunity to also crucify the two terrorists that were Barabbas accomplices ? The governor was hesitated. Officially, the execution of these murderers had been initially set for two days after the observance of Passover. Pontius made a moue of displeasure; however, the head centurion persisted in making him see that as things were, a collective crucifixion would neutralize the potential risks that might be produced by the death of a few Zealots.

Most of the Jewish population encouraged and protected these revolutionaries and it was possible that the execution of such guerrillas could cause a disruption in the public order. Following the priests’ implacable insistence on capital punishment for the Galilean, it was highly unlikely they would register any protest if the crucifixion of the members of the independence movement took place at the same time as that of the supposed “King of the Jews”. Pontius listened silently to his commanders reasoning and moved his hands in an unenthusiastic manner thus making Civilis understand that he gave his consent, but he must act fast. With a simple nod, the centurion advised Arsenius to attend to the Zealots’ transfer.

At that moment, Pilate noticed me and drew me aside while the officers were waiting for the new prisoners to arrive.

“Jason, what does your science say about all this?” the corpulent prefect inquired. “I did not have the time to thoroughly question you about the omens you predicted for today. Tell me plainly...I command you!”

Pontius was equally consumed by fear and curiosity. So I had no remedy other than improvisation.

“Yesterday at midnight,” I lied, “when I found myself on the Mount of Olives, I had sensed something... After seeking a pure place for an augural, I turned to the north, tracing the temple or quarter of the heavens on the ground with my staff. Then, as you know, I took the *lituus*,” here I pointed to ‘Moses’ staff’ “and performed the rite of drawing the sections¹. Once I was situated, I prayed for the gods to give me a sign.”

¹ Fortunately, for me, I had been instructed in the ancient art of Greek and Roman divination and haruspex. Given the *templum* or part of the sky to be observed, the soothsayer takes a *lituus* and turns to the south while tracing a line, called a *cardo*, through the sky from north to south. Then another line, named a

Pilate was holding his breath; he encouraged me to continue.

“Honorable governor, the sky was as serene and clear as the eyes of a goddess. Unfortunately,” I lied again, “the wind had stopped. Everything presaged an answer. Suddenly the infernal low flying birds surged on my left. The fact that they were flying low and the direction of their flight were the main determinants—”

“Of what?” Pontius burst out. “What do you mean by this?”

I adopted a false calm and gazing at him, I replied, making Ennio’s prediction mine, “Then at the height of misfortune, they thundered off to the left while the sky remained completely calm.”

Pilate widened his eyes aghast. He was very familiar with the meaning of this tall tale. Cicero marvelously criticized it in his day. With a pale face, he entreated me to decipher the omen.

“In my humble opinion,” I concluded, “Jupiter, for reasons which I cannot manage to comprehend, is distressed. And it is possible he will manifest his anger without much delay.” Here I lied for the third time, “The sky will be the witness to what he will reveal.”

“Today?”

I nodded, presenting him with a grave expression while deflecting my gaze to the Nazarene. Pontius also turned his head and groaned. Forgetting both the conversation and me, he went back to stand next to his centurions. I was about to ask Civilis for an authorization for me to stay with the escort and to be present at the execution, when the soldier who had measured Jesus’ span, erupted into the courtyard via one of its many doors which opened under the colonnades.

Based upon his agility, this soldier was very accustomed to performing this task: he had picked up one of the javelins. While his companion held the Galilean’s arms in the position they would have on the cross, he moved the *pilum* and positioned it on the prisoner’s back, thereby measuring the total distance between the centers of both of his palms.

Now that the Roman had completed his macabre measurement, he returned to the courtyard carrying a heavy beam, which was a rough unsanded tree trunk with a coarse hole or orifice in its center. This clumsy, rough hole was about ten centimeters in diameter and divided the beam into two sections, which gave me a sense of its thickness. The mercenary came equipped with a long thick rope that he laid on one of the faces of the *patibulum*¹ or crossbar as he set one of its perfectly sawed off ends on the pavement and waited.

decumanus, is drawn from east to west. Thus dividing the visible part of the sky into a square with four quadrants. Next, two parallel lines are traced inside to form a square that is projected over the Earth and this creates the aforementioned *templum* or prism. The area which lies in front is called the entry, while the part behind is the exit [Major’s note].

¹ The source of the *patibulum* is the piece of timber used to bar doors in Rome. Once it is removed, the door can be opened, hence the name [Major’s note].

With the beam in this vertical position, I could confirm it was nearly two meters long, but perhaps only 1.90 meters. I also calculated its thickness to be approximately 25 centimeters. It was definitely a solid log, which I believed, weighed no less than thirty kilograms.

Feigning a considerable amount of curiosity, I approached the soldier and asked him what the trunk as to be used for in Greek. He smiled wryly and, after first pointing to Jesus, made a sign to me with his thumb. He pointed it downwards in the manner of the Caesars when they decree that a gladiator is to be killed immediately. I stroked the crossbar's ridged surface and concluded that it was a section of a tree which was a species of pine common in Palestine or maybe an import from the Lebanese forests. (I am not sure, it could have been *pinus halepensis*, which has virtually indestructible wood.)

I was so lost in my analysis, that I did not notice when the two Zealots arrived. The *optio* and the mercenaries led them with their hands tied, to the governor and the rest of the centurions. No sooner had he seen them, than Civilis ordered their grimy tunics removed and the commencement of the obligatory flogging prior to their crucifixion. So four soldiers, with as many *flagra*, proceeded to whip the guerillas.

One of them, who was almost a teenager, knelt before Pontius sniveling and begging for mercy, but the governor quickly turned around and walked away from the prisoner. As the whips cracked again in the center of that place, the soldier who had disappeared into the arched tunnel, which led to the west gate of Antonia's tower, came back running and handed Longinus a small wooden board that measured about 60 centimeters by 20 centimeters. It was completely white and made from gypsum or white lead.

The centurion took the board and a type of small burning wooden taper, then he asked the soldier to fetch two new slabs. Then he called for the governor's attention and showed him the little tablet and the sharpened piece of coal. He mentioned how the escort must place this above the crosses to identify each one of the convicts and the nature of his crimes. I was beginning to tremble with emotion again. I was on the verge of witnessing the writing of the so-called "INRI".

There was also an issue about this subject, though only circumstantially, in respect to the wording, that the four evangelists had manifest discrepancies. Which one of them had been correct about the text? Mark had said, 'King of the Jews' (Mark 15:26). For his part, Matthew adds, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews' (Matthew 27:37). As for Luke, his INRI reads, 'This is the King of the Jews' (Luke 23:38). Lastly, John Zebedee, who was called "The Evangelist", reported the following text: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' (John 19:19). Who was right?

I discretely leaned over the governor's shoulder and noticed his hand was shaking. He held the small board horizontally and firmly pressed it against his brilliant cuirass. He had grasped the charcoal in his right hand, but he averted his face from the whitewashed wooden rectangular surface. I realized the governor was looking at Jesus, so I peered at him out of the corner of my eye.

The Teacher had not unglued his lips during all of this time. He continued to regulate his breathing, yet he was still stooped and shuddering. The blood kept on dripping, although in a lesser amount, from beneath his tunic and forming a circle around his feet.

One of the guerillas, the older one, writhed on the flagstones hollering at every lash. The mercenaries had torn his tunic so that his entire torso was uncovered. In spite of his hands being

bound behind his back and controlled by another soldier who held the other end of the rope, which tied him, to the Zealot rolled on the pavement in pain and desperation, thereby putting the latter soldier in trouble.

The younger prisoner, whose clothing was equally torn, had curled himself up into a ball as he tried to cover his head with his legs. But the blows were so violent that he did soon position himself on his knees, offering his back to the floggers while he emitted shrieks which made a corps of guards and numerous soldiers come over to see what was happening.

Pilate grew increasingly nervous each moment. All at once, he started to write in his characteristic square handwriting, 'Jesus of Nazareth'. These first words were written in Aramaic, from right to left. They were thirty centimeters tall and filled the entire upper half of the tablet. Pilate prevaricated again. Actually, he was conscious of the falsity of the accusations, so it was logical for him to stumble on a serious problem.

The younger Zealot, raised his sweated distorted face and searched for Jesus. Then, despite the strength of the guard's yanking, he dragged himself to his knees in front of the Rabbi. Next in the midst of a rain of furious lashes he rose to his feet and sank his face in the pools of blood escaping from the edge of the Rabbi's tunic.

"Teacher!" he exclaimed between sobs, "Have mercy upon us! Don't let us die!"

Jesus half-opened his swollen blackened eyes and gazed at the wretched man with infinite tenderness. Yet before he could respond, the soldier who held the rope, gave the Teacher a violent push that made him stagger backwards. One of the scourges aimed his *flagrum* at Christ primed to hurt him, but Civilis, who was attentive to what was occurring, intervened by holding the Nazarene up by his armpits, thus preventing his collapse. Then he turned to the detachment and ordered them not to flog the "King of the Jews."

"He has already received his punishment," he remarked.

The floggers continued their ruthless attacks, opening fresh wounds on the Zealots' backs legs, and sides. Meanwhile the one who had approached the Galilean remained on his knees with his head fixed to the flagstones. On a desperate impulse, his companion stood up and launched a frantic kick into one of the scourges' lower abdomen. The Roman doubled over like a doll and fell to the ground howling in pain.

Pontius, who had his back to this bloody scene, resumed writing, '...King of the Jews.' Hence, John was the only evangelist who had been absolutely faithful in his transcription of INRI (*Iesvs Nazarevs Rex Ivdæorum*). He immediately repeated the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews", almost automatically, in Greek, and lastly in Latin. As he returned the board to Longinus, he shook the palms of his hands and made an ostentatious scowl of repugnance.

But at that moment, the soldier whom the centurion sent to procure another two wooden slabs, returned and, in spite of himself, Pontius had to repeat the operation. This time it was much more cursory. After asking the names of the condemned men, he wrote on the white tablets: 'Gestas, Thief' and 'Dismas, Thief.' Of course, these descriptions were written in the three languages commonly in use in Palestine during that era, namely Aramaic, the first language; Greek, the "universal" language, as English or Spanish would be today; and Latin, which was Pilate's native tongue.

The governor walked a few steps to the circular fountain and rinsed his hands. When he was ready to leave, I overtook him and asked if I could be permitted to stay and attend the executions.

“If something truly supernatural happens,” I argued, “I want to be present.”

Pilate shrugged mechanically as he was immersed in his thoughts, and passed my request on to Civilis. He assumed the responsibility of introducing me to Longinus, presenting me as an augur who was a friend of Tiberius. I gauged that the first qualification did not impress the veteran excessively, but the second one was different.

At that instant, Arsenius’ interrupted to inform me that he was the captain of the platoon I had encountered the previous night. Pontius nonchalantly raised his arm to salute his officials, and departed. Civilis did not delay in following him.

When the soldiers saw their colleague fall a victim to the kicks delivered by the terrorist, the whips were not the only instruments of torture. With an unusual rage, the floggers as well as the curious spectators supplemented the lashes with innumerable kicks which eventually made the revolutionary fold over. Once he was on the ground, the leather thongs from the Roman’s scourge repeatedly embedded into the prisoner’s body until, within a few seconds, a thin line of blood spurted out of the corners of his mouth.

The arrival of two somewhat shorter beams than the ones destined for the Nazarene’s cross halted the flogging. However, this momentary breather only prolonged an agonizing “pilgrimage”. Under the watchful vigilance of Longinus and his *optio* and without the least aforethought or ceremony, the soldiers positioned the tree trunks on the Zealots’ shoulders and last cervical vertebrae, as the mercenaries forced the prisoners to extend their arms until the backs of their hands stuck to the rough wooden beams.

The younger revolutionary remained on his knees, while his semi-conscious companion, had the crossbar attached to him while he stayed in the same position they had left him in: prone. Neither of the two had enough strength to resist. The one who had appealed for clemency, sobbed piteously as the thick heavy rope immobilized his wrists, arms, and armpits. The Romans began to secure the first prisoner to the right end of the crossbar. They attached it along the length of his arms up to his left wrist. From there the rope fell to the convict’s left foot where it was tied around his ankle. Once they finished securing the first beam with the rope, the executioners repeated the process with the second guerilla.

Finally, the soldiers, carrying about four meters of rope (the last of the long rope) went to the Teacher. Jesus saw them approach and before they could beat him or pull his hair to make him bend down, he meekly leaned forward and offered his devastated shoulders. However, the Rabbi was far taller than the executioners were and his voluntary inclination of his chest was insufficient. Since it was impossible to push his head, one of the soldiers grabbed his beard and pulled it to the ground. They remained there until the man’s comrades in arms, who were waiting nearby, deposited the crossbar on Jesus’ back.

Then two other legionnaires spread the Rabbi’s arms while a third and a fourth soldier held the heavy tree trunk. They hoisted it at both ends and dropped it so that it hit the Galilean on the nape of his neck. However, helmet’s multiple spiny barbs formed an obstacle: the thick wooden cylinder would not fit properly or precisely on top of his trapezius muscles. It kept rolling down his back.

Growing increasingly breathless, the Romans struck Jesus on the back of his neck three times. Eventually Jesus was so seized by the new pains, that he lowered his head himself which enabled them to set the crossbar on the raised area above his shoulder blades. At each one of these brutal attempts to position the wooden beam, I experienced a peculiar whiplash coursing through my insides.

The thorns located in the zone around his nape and occipital region were embedded a little deeper at each undertaking, tearing through his scalp and possibly sinking into his epicranial aponeurosis (the sheet like tendon that covers the bones in his cranium). Orthopedic surgeons know very well what type of pain perforating this layer produces. The prolonged intense pain made Jesus moan at each one of the three impacts. Within seconds, his hair and neck were glistening again from the profuse bleeding.

The executioners stretched his arms under the trunk and proceeded to anchor him to it by knotting the rope from right to left and binding the rope around his left ankle. The considerable weight of the crossbar, at least for a man so severely beaten—caused the Rabbi's body to tilt dangerously, forcing him to bend his legs.

Jesus tried to lift his head. It seemed as though his muscles and arteries were about to burst beneath the reddened skin on his neck. Yet each time he intended to rise and control the timber's weight, the crossbar's rough bark and the pain from the spines that pierced his neck mercilessly constrained him. Thus overwhelmed, he stooped with his face to the ground. The Teacher seemed resigned once he understood that all of his efforts to attain a vertical position were in vain.

His breathing was agitated. Again, I feared that at any moment the effort would lead him to lose consciousness once more. (Logically none of the evangelists were present at this dramatic moment when he was first put under the weight of the crossbar. This difficult and critical interval is never reflected in any of their writings. Jesus of Nazareth's mangled body was suddenly crushed by the beam, leaving his muscles in the exact position they were in the instant it was placed across his neck and shoulders. There was neither a "warm-up" nor a possibility for his main muscle packets to react in a conventional way.

In summary, this precipitated a disruption in his cardiac and arterial frequencies for the umpteenth time. In a matter of three to five minutes from the moment the soldiers succeeded in fastening his arms to the crossbar, his heart rate rose to 170 beats per minute and his blood pressure was elevated to a maximum of around 190. In my opinion, this was the stroke which consumed any scarce energy that still remained. On seeing him in this deplorable state, I asked myself how he could endure holding the horizontal beam on his shoulders...

But a new event was on the verge of causing more heartrending suffering for the body of the giant from Galilee. While Arsenius proceeded to nail the three wooden signs on the shaft of the *pilum*, another soldier noticed the Teacher's sandals. He showed them to Longinus, who, in a gesture of honor and commiseration for the prisoner, ordered the soldier to put Jesus' sandals back on. The soldier sat on his heels in front of the Rabbi. It was necessary for him to use both of his hands to lift Jesus' left foot in order to place the sandal over the sole. In the process, the Nazarene's body was shifted off balance to the opposite side, resulting in Jesus' disastrous but spectacular fall. The incident was as swift as it was startling.

Since his arms were tied, the Galilean could not disengage from the collapsing crossbar. So when its right end struck the pavement thrice, Jesus was squashed facedown between it and the flagstones. As soon as I heard the violent crash against the flagstones, I feared for the worst. While the soldiers dashed to pick him up, I observed that the helmet of spines had fortunately acted as a shield, preventing his facial bones from shattering. In return, the thorns at his forehead, temples, and cheeks had gouged a bit further into this flesh, thereby revealing the subcutaneous connective tissue in some areas and producing new intense hemorrhages.

Despite the extreme intensity of the fall, the Nazarene did not lose consciousness. Two executioners lifted the crossbar and aligned it with his shoulders whilst the clumsy soldier finished donning Jesus' shoes. Once this disastrous action was concluded, the executioners released the timber and the Rabbi assumed the weight again, stooping over a second time. The impossibility of moving his head backward noticeably reduced his field of vision, practically limiting it to the ground he tread upon. On several occasions, during this short but rugged trek to Calvary, I watched how the Teacher would force his gaze upwards. Even though whenever he wrinkled his brow, the spines ripped into his wounds and the acute pain obliged him to lower his eyes.

Toward the sixth hour, Longinus gave the command to start the march. The escort had been augmented by other members of the infantry who were all heavily armed. Eight of them flanked the prisoners and the rest, who brought the total to twelve, spread out at the head of the procession, immediately behind the centurion and his lieutenant, and at the end of the queue. Each prisoner had been assigned a contingent of four soldiers who were expressly responsible for his security and subsequent crucifixion.

One of the foot soldiers carried a grimy leather sack, which hung from a stick in the shape of a pitchfork, that he quickly put over his shoulder. A pair of Romans bearing a ladder, which was about five meters long, brought up the rear of the procession. Four of the soldiers who were on the left and the right side of the Zealots, untwisted their scourges and resumed flogging them in accordance to the custom prior to the execution. With moans and sanguineous bodies, the first two convicts began to walk, staggering under the weight of the crossbars.

In compliance with the ridged rules for security, the three prisoners were tethered together at the ankles with the same rope. Hence, any possible attempt to flee was exceedingly problematic. At the start of the march, the convict man in the center jerked the thick rope, forcing the Nazarene, who occupied the third and last place, to follow him. The pronounced oscillations of the log the Rabbi carried, his faltering, unsteady steps, along with the laborious dragging of his left leg made all of us fear for a new sudden fall or—what would have been much worse—a potential heart attack. And I say “all of us” because from the onset the soldiers who closed me off from the escort exchanged worried glances which were confirmed by significant head movements to the effect that the prisoner was not in any condition to get to Golgotha. Yet, for the time being, no one said anything.

The convicts crossed the first twenty-five meters and the platoon entered the vaulted tunnel through the west gate. I had used this one on my visit to Antonia's with the venerable Arimathean. Unfortunately, there would be a new problem...Some inquisitive sentinels emerged from the corps of guards at the gate and joined in the jeering as the condemned men passed by. When the guerilla who walked in the middle reached the level of the guards, that fellow Gistas took advantage of the fact that the legionnaires had stopped flogging him, on account of the low light and the narrowness of the passage, to turn to his left and spit on the nearest Roman.

Before the executioners could lay a hand on him, he rammed the edge of his crossbar into the face of the sentinel who was walking on his right. The soldier fell precipitously backwards onto Jesus and both of them rolled on the pavement in the dark humid tunnel. On this occasion, the collision caused the Galilean to land on his back. The commotion was indescribable. Some of the Roman escort and several members of the guard corps who were thoroughly enraged with the guerilla brutally drove the shafts of their javelins into the provocateur's belly, ribs, and teeth until he fell to his knees. Presently Longinus and Arsenius rushed to the center of the passage, trying to bring order to the tumult.

Other soldiers helped their colleague who had been struck with the wooden beam. One of its edges had opened his left cheek producing a showy hemorrhage. The centurion examined the gash and ordered him to be relieved at once. Another sentinel occupied his post. Meanwhile, Jesus remained supine and motionless, unable to stand. The thorns had injured his nape again and, with a rictus of pain, the Teacher endeavored to move his head forward in order to avoid contact with the wood.

A number of soldiers who carried scourges, turned to the Rabbi and began to beat him in their blind rage. Although they insulted him and insisted that he stand, their demands were so inane that they were absurd. No one in that position could have lifted the crossbar alone. In a desperate attempt to obey, the Nazarene bent his legs and tensed his thighs. But within seconds he gave up exhausted and defeated. Before logic and good judgment were interposed between the confused soldiers, another Roman leaned over the Teacher and started pulling him by his beard in the midst of a torrent of blasphemies and imprecations. The executioner was so infuriated that he twisted his fingers into Jesus face and, in one savage jerk, took out a tuft of hair.

The piece of beard that the soldier yanked out also included part of the epidermis and the hypodermis or the subcutis layer of skin, so that the fibrous bands of square muscle in the area on the right were left exposed through the bubbling blood. With a loud mournful cry, the Galilean let his head fall back against the crossbar, as he was prey to the unbearable pain expected from having innumerable sensory nerves ripped out. (It is important to note that "pain sensors" were among the tiny organs that were violently torn away. These are specific sensory receptors for pain, which are planted like trees in the interstices of the stratum basale layer of the skin's stratified squamous epithelium.) The sentinel was either so surprised or frightened by this that he did not attack Jesus again.

The *optio*, who had more common sense than his men did, willingly helped Jesus to stand up. So the procession continued its march with the two revolutionaries being mangled by lashes and blows and Jesus of Nazareth, who was irreconcilably consumed by a fever, following at a weak gallop. As we stepped on the drawbridge, its metallic cover reflected the sun which was almost at its zenith, fully illuminating the Teacher's figure. The tumble had reopened some of his wounds once again, drenching his tunic, which had lost its original color. Several streams of blood fell ceaselessly down his Achilles' tendons flooding his sandals. The Teacher approached the exterior wall of Antonia's Tower dragging his feet. His respiration grew increasingly labored and his head and torso stooped lower centimeter by centimeter.

When we had travelled just over 45 meters from the center of the arcaded courtyard, the platoon halted again at an opening in the wall. The narrow entry obliged the soldiers to tilt the prisoners' crossbars so they could cross into the area outside the general headquarters. From there onwards, things could get complicated, so the soldiers closed ranks, keeping a minimum distance between themselves and the convicts. Longinus signaled to his deputy and went to the front of the

procession raising his *pilum* with both of his hands. The *pilum* held the three tablets containing the names and crimes of those who were being led to the scaffold.

No sooner had we left the fortress, than we were surprised by gusts of wind that were stronger than the ones I had felt during Pontius' address on the Praetorium's terrace. This wind came from the east laden with dust and sand. Intrigued by its sudden worsening with time, I pressed the button for the auditory connection and asked Eliseo what news he had about an impending instability in the upper atmospheric levels on the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

My partner, whom I had neglected for a few hours, reproached me for my silence, however he understood that circumstances had not been optimal for keeping him informed. He immediately went on to explain that the turbulence had transformed into a haboob¹ or tempest with a violent wind fueled by contact with a jet current and another system with a different barometric pressure.

The tempest had intensified particularly along its western periphery by a drop in atmospheric pressure located in southern Iraq. The electronic systems on the *cradle* detected conical shaped currents of airborne particulate matter that were moving in a west northwesterly direction in fronts ranging around one hundred kilometers. The bands of this haboob had twisted and expanded until they were approximately five hundred kilometers wide raising gigantic clouds of sand that originated in the Arabian Deserts of An Nafud and ad-Dahna. According to the module's detector, these gusts attained speeds of 25 and 30 knots per hour. Contrary to Eliseo's assumption, the storm's arrival had raised the relative humidity and prompted a slight decrease in the temperature.

"*Santa Claus* estimates the visibility inside the dust cloud to be about 300 meters." My brother added, "The central lobe of the haboob is expected to sweep over the city between 30 and 45 minutes from now."

This meant if the procession arrived at the site for the crucifixion before the storm entered that section of Jerusalem, the "twilight" due to the banks of suspended sand would move over us while the crucifixion was in full execution. At that moment, how little could one imagine that the famous "twilight" described by the evangelists had hardly anything to do with the sun being obscured by a cloud of dust...

A short distance from the stone wall which surrounded that part of Antonia's Tower, stood a group of Jews (I estimated there were about 200) these were same ones who had helped to condemn Jesus in front of the praetorium. I found a few Sadducees among them. Of course Joseph of Arimathea was there accompanied by another one of David Zebedee's young emissaries. This most recent one had communicated to the illustrious man that Mary, the Teacher's mother and his other relatives were already on their way to Jerusalem where they probably would meet John on the road to Bethany.

According to Joseph, Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin had gone to the Temple where they were preparing to present a report to the rest of the Sanhedrin about the events of that morning and the imminent death of the Rabbi from Galilee. Yet the Arimathean's deepest

¹ In meteorology, a haboob is a dust storm that forms over the deserts during a period of convective instability. The word haboob is derived from the Arabic for "violent wind". There have been notable famous haboobs in Sudan with speeds of up to 85 kilometers per hour [Major's note].

concern was not the Teacher's fate. He knew the governor's sentence was not open to appeal and that only Jesus' divine power could save him from certain death. His thoughts were preoccupied with another problem. Once Pontius' pronouncement against the Galilean had been successfully obtained, the priests departed from the fortress to discuss and plan their next action: the capture and annihilation of Jesus' disciples.

Joseph had warned the courier about this operation and urged him to leave for Gethsemane and notify David and as many of Jesus' friends and followers as he could find. And so he did. I dared to hint that his presence among the high priests and the Sadducees could be more useful than his participation in the tragic procession. Unable to restrain his tears, Joseph nodded in shock from observing the Nazarene's bloodied face and his bent, weakening body shouldering the heavy beam.

When the Jewish leaders read Jesus' INRI they blocked the *optio's* and the platoon's path and angrily protested the inscription. Longinus tried to calm the agitated Hebrews by making them see that Pontius himself had handwritten the signs. It was futile. The Sadducees demanded that the centurion change the text by removing the expression "King of the Jews." The tension reached its maximum when some of the rabble picked up stones and threw them at the soldiers.

Several foot soldiers advanced and covered Longinus and the *optio* with their shields. Without losing his temper, the centurion moved away from the soldiers who were protecting him and loudly warned the group to disperse. Then, pointing to the third board, the one that corresponded to Jesus of Nazareth, advised the Sanhedrin's followers that if they wished to alter the inscription, they must go back to Antonia and discuss the matter with Pontius.

Longinus' words abated the Jews' furor. Three of the judges quickly left in the direction of the praetorium, ready to negotiate about what they considered an insult to their nationalism. I was not going to see Pilate again during this first "grand journey". Nonetheless, advancing events, I can point out that in our second "adventure" Civilis told me about the encounter with the "despicable priests" thanks to Pontius' attitude.

This time the governor demonstrated his inflexibility by reminding the Hebrews that this accusation had been one of the accusations which had motivated the condemnation. Apparently, when the Sadducees were convinced of the Roman's hard and intransigent position, they suggested that he at least modify the text by changing it to one which read, 'He has said: I am the King of the Jews.'

Pontius reply was the same as before, "What I have written has been written for me."

The Sanhedrin's representatives had no recourse but to withdraw, but not without threatening the governor with endless curses and calls for divine punishment...

Now that this incident was diffused, the centurions gave the order to proceed. He unsheathed his sword and the mob opened a path for them without hesitation. The majority of these hundreds of fanatics were unemployed people bought off by the Sanhedrin or simply morbidly bloodthirsty people. They lurched backwards instantaneously, clearing a passageway for the platoon and the convicts to file through.

As much as I looked, I did could not find a single one of Jesus' friends or disciples. In regard to the crowd that shouted for Barabbas' liberation and the Galilean's crucifixion, where were they? These Hebrews were a fraction of the two or three thousand who had assembled

minutes earlier in front of the steps leading to Pontius' residence. This sudden disinterest in the end of the hated "King of the Jews" confirmed my hypothesis that the vast majority of the Jews who came to the praetorium that morning had only one intention: to solicit for the traditional release of one prisoner. Essentially, it was all the same to them who fell from grace.

If the judges had cried for Jesus' release, the crowd probably would have joined in chanting the Nazarene's name. Once their curiosity was satisfied, the thousands of pilgrims and residents of Jerusalem's environs departed practically forgetting about the convicted man. Yet here were about two hundred stumbling cowards who wanted to interfere with something. Longinus, who was a man with extensive experience, doubtlessly thought leading the Zealots and the "king" through the city's streets in the upper district would entail complications for his men and for himself. Therefore in adherence to his excellent discernment, he used a different road from the one traditionally used for this type of procession.

Generally prisoners who were about to be executed were paraded through the city's winding streets as an example to the populace. On this occasion, I maintain that the centurion choose a much shorter path. I am sorry to disappoint those who have believed and those who still believe in a "painful journey" through the narrow streets of the upper district. There was none of that. The centurion and the soldiers veered north and entered a road that led to Caesarea and ran almost parallel to the Tyropoeon Valley. (Today the same course, though somewhat more northeasterly, crosses the Damascus Gate in the north wall.)

The Hebrews who had hurled stones at the Roman escort were the first to be bewildered by the change in the itinerary. A few, who were led by the Sadducees, began to follow Longinus and the patrol. I suppose this strange variation in the traditional route for prisoners stirred their curiosity even more. By my calculations, Jesus had walked close to one hundred meters from the courtyard in Antonia's Tower, when the centurions improvised a shift from the street, setting off to the left and initiating a descent to the Tyropoeon gorge in towards one of the corners of the northern wall of the city.

The wind raised colossal masses of dust and dirt over the outskirts of Jerusalem, making an already difficult road even more painful for the Teacher and the bandits. Their public flagellation had been resumed, however the sloping uneven terrain diminished the precision of the executor's aim for the blows.

It was exactly at the bottom of this short gradual slope, which was sown with thistle and spiny caltrops, that the Nazarene's hobbling, humiliated body lost its balance again and toppled to the ground in a cloud of dust. This time Jesus was able to fall on his knees, which smashed against the rocks. The prisoner's third fall forced the convoy to stop. Two of the executioners went back to flog the Teacher, trying to make him stand.

Panting with his mouth open amid an elevated heart rate, the giant finally managed to lift his right leg. However, his left leg was so destroyed by the scourge that it did not respond. The Son of Man clenched his teeth with all of his might. The muscles in his neck tensed until they produced a dangerous cramp in his sternocleidomastoid muscle. His closed eyes reflected a strong desire to overcome the wood's weight, but exhaustion, thirst and his even more worrisome decreasing blood volume was more powerful than his will. By this time, it was quite possible the Rabbi had lost about two liters of blood.

In spite the flogging, the prisoner's body was far from recuperating, in fact, it was curving more and more until his chin touched his right knee. At this critical juncture, the

centurion's voice made the mercenaries halt. Longinus himself, aided by two other soldiers pushed the crossbar away, thus easing the prisoner's recovery. Once he was on his feet, the procession continued its descent to the bottom of the valley's floor.

From there to Golgotha, the road was much more dramatic. Based upon my calculations, the Tyropoeon's ravine was 745 meters above sea level. We had descended five meters (Antonia's Fortress and Caesar's court were 750 meters above sea level) and Calvary was 755 meters above sea level. Hence, from this moment, the path would continually slope downwards. Yet to my amazement, the Nazarene successfully descended the steep slope with less hardship that I imagined. He reeled and breathed through his mouth, still he managed to cover another one hundred meters. This brought the total distance to about 250 meters since we left Antonia's. Nevertheless, I was deceived.

The sad reality soon prevailed. Suddenly we stopped. The beam rocked nervously from side to side and Jesus collapsed on his knees, seized by more intense convulsions. Fortunately for him, this time the procession barely paused for a few seconds. The Rabbi advanced, dragging his knees over the rough slope. I could not avoid a feeling of admiration. This man who was in the decline of his life—was capable of continuing in whatever way possible—until he reached his proper end...

Longinus had selected the route along the perimeter of the northern wall as a way to avoid Jerusalem's crowded streets and simultaneously shorten the journey. Even so, physical and I believe, mental exhaustion set Jesus on the brink of going into shock again. His fingers were beginning to turn violet, which was an unmistakable sign of poor circulation in his upper extremities due to prolonged muscular tension.

Although it was impossible to confirm this during those distressing moments, it was more than certain his shoulders and arms had commenced the process of tetanization, thereby adding a new sharp pain, which was a consequence of the progressive crystallization of lactic acid in his muscles. (This process of tetanization could be one of the most arduous forms of torture the Teacher would face during the first minutes of his crucifixion.)

With his head and torso bent over, waves of sand enveloped the Galilean every time he gained a span of ground. Small columns of dust rose up each time he dragged his knees. His blood soaked tunic as well as his hair, beard, and face held a lot of dirt. He breathed faster and faster. When he had barely walked fifty meters farther, a cold sweat bathed his neck and temples. Now because of his rigid muscles, Jesus moved forward very jerkily, almost shaking in a typical "spasmodic" march.

Abruptly, I saw him raise his face twice, trying to inhale the maximum amount of air and, without anyone being able to prevent it, he clattered to the ground. The soldiers did not hesitate; they set about kicking the Nazarene's inert body before the centurion had time to intervene. The fourteen nails in the shape of an "S" on the soles of their sandals opened fresh wounds on his legs, and I suppose, nearly all of the areas where they aimed their kicks, namely his kidneys, ribs, and back. His left foot was twisted to the right and one of his furious tormentors stomped on it twice. On the second impact, the toenail on his big toe jumped cleanly away.

The condemned man was only a few meters from the top of the slope when his strength definitely abandoned him. Longinus' arrival dug a trench around his futile beating. I say futile since the Teacher has lost consciousness. The officer, who was aware of the infantry soldiers'

harsh intervention in the flagellation, reprimanded them for their ludicrous conduct. Then he crouched down and placed his fingers on Jesus' carotid artery to check his pulse.

“He’s still alive,” he exclaimed with relief.

Four appointed guards proceeded to lift the crossbar, but Jesus was still literally attached to the beam with his head sunk down over his chest. One of the soldiers suggested to the centurion that the timber be untied. Longinus scanned the horizon. Once he confirmed that we were very close to the Gate of Ephraim, he rejected that idea, ordering them to transport the prisoner with the crossbar to the rampart. This was done.

Without stopping to think, the platoon resumed the march up the steep slope to the city’s northwest entrance. Two of the executioners placed ends of the timber as well as the unconscious prisoner on their respective shoulders thereby hoisting up the unconscious prisoner. For a distance of 80 to 100 meters, Jesus’ feet were dragged mercilessly through weeds and small rock formations, which scraped off even more tissue.

Once we were next to the rampart, at the foot of the gate and the small road that leads from that angle to Jaffa, the soldiers set the Teacher down so that leaned against the blocks in the high wall. While two of them held the beam, another man unloosed the rope that tied it to Jesus. His limp arms fell to his sides. The same thing happened to his head, which flopped down over his chest. The executors who had been flogging the Zealots took advantage of this pause to rest at the edge of the road and the exhausted guerillas fell flat too.

It was not long before a huddle of curious people peered up the steep incline. Yet as soon as they noticed the platoon had halted, they kept a prudent distance away and hung on every one of the Romans’ movements. The foot traffic on this high road was busy. We were very nigh to the observance of the traditional Passover Seder. Pilgrims hurried along the road herding horses and flocks of lambs. Many of them stopped under the arch of the Gate of Ephraim because they were surprised by the spectacle of these bloody half-naked men sunk under the weight of the wooden crossbars. Nonetheless, the sand and dust storm grew stronger, so most of them immediately departed after taking a quick look. I surmise that very few of those who came recognized the Nazarene.

The centurion and his deputy re-examined Jesus. Both of them were obviously seriously worried. They did not want the prisoner to die during the conveyance, as this would complicate things. At Longinus’ request, the soldier who carried the leather sack drew out a large clay pitcher, with its base covered with rope braided like a hairnet, and, protecting it from the dust with his own body; he filled a pale green metal bowl with a colorless liquid. The centurion brought the container to Jesus’ lips.

He reacted favorably on first contact with something he primarily identified as water. As I stared at him, I surveyed how his lips were cracked with the yellow spots at the edges, which are characteristic of dehydration. The Galilean slowly drained the concoction. When he finished, his mouth remained half-open as his body shuddered from the chills produced by his fever.

It was then that I saw into his mouth and to my horror established that the Rabbi’s beautiful set of teeth were broken. I squatted on my heels beside Longinus and touched Jesus’ bottom lip with my fingers in order to expose his teeth. One of the lower incisors had disappeared and only part of the second incisor’s crown was present. These losses could have only occurred in one of his many falls. My opinion was that it was in either the first one or the fourth and final

one. Jesus opened his eyes as much as he could when he felt the gentle pressure of my fingers lowering his bottom lip. His left eye was practically closed by hematomas and the gash in his eyebrow. My gaze must have been very intense and compassionate because I divined a spark of gratitude in his pupil. Hypotonia or the softness of his eyeball was so evident that it confirmed the severity of the dehydration he was suffering. The temperature of his lip was so high that I was unable to abstain from making a comment to the officer about the prisoner's fragile state.

Longinus stood up, making gesture of preoccupation and walked to the road where he watched the people passing by. At first, I thought this was an odd reaction for the captain of the escort. Later I came to understand why he distanced himself from the platoon. While I monitored how the Galilean regained his breath, a group of twenty or thirty women appeared under Ephraim's arch. Undoubtedly, they came to meet the Teacher since they stopped when they discovered him at the foot of the rampart.

They advanced timidly. When they were three meters away, one of the Romans blocked their path with his javelin. I stood up and searched anxiously for the Teacher's mother, but I soon realized this attempt to identify her was ridiculous. I did not know Mary. The women burst into tears. These were silent bitter tears. The Galilean turned his head and contemplated the group of Jewish women. He inhaled deeply. The before the general surprise, he spoke out in a hoarse voice.

"Daughters of Jerusalem...! Don't weep for me. It would be much better to cry for yourselves and your relatives..."

The wind whipped the women's mantles and they not stop sobbing.

After a brief pause Jesus added, "My mission is almost accomplished. Very soon I will go to my father, but the epoch of terrible evils for Jerusalem hasn't even begun."

As the chills intensified, he made a final effort to conclude, "There will come days in which it will be said 'Blessed are the barren and those whose breasts do not nurse their young...' In those days, you will beg the rocks to fall on you so that you may be freed from the terror of your tribulations."

These women were courageous, much more so than the Teacher's friends and disciples. With the exception of John Zebedee, Joseph of Arimathea, and the young John Mark—whom we encountered a few minutes later—the rest had not had enough courage to follow the Teacher not even from afar. Amid his turmoil, the Nazarene realized this and perhaps because of it directed these words to this handful of followers.

The soldier held the *pilum* down with both hands, thus forcing the women to recede. But one of the women stepped up to the foot soldier and showed him a coin instead of obeying. Then she whispered into the executor's ear. He accepted the money. After he confirmed what the woman held enclosed in her other hand, he allowed her to pass.

This Hebrew woman was one I had seen doing chores at the campsite at Gethsemane. She ran to the rabbi, knelt on the ground and extended her left hand so that she placed something between the Nazarene's lips. They were raisins—raisins from Corinth! One of Jesus' favorite fruits... The good woman successfully put these raisins in the Teacher's mouth; she did not have time for more. The same soldier, who had let her through, left the group, retraced his steps, and

forced her to leave the place. With a final loving gesture to the Son of Man, she moved away and did not see Longinus arrive.

A strapping man who was about fifty years old and had white, slightly citrine colored skin accompanied him. He wore a turban and his clothes were different from the type usually worn by the Hebrews: the loose pants were a brilliant green color and pulled up to the middle of his leg. From what I could ascertain, he spoke Greek with evident difficulty.

At the centurion's orders, he picked up Jesus' crossbar and the escort rose and resumed lashing the Zealots' backs. The *optio* returned to the front of the platoon, while Longinus signaled for two of his men to take care of the third prisoner. The infantry soldiers hung their swords in their cross belts and worked together to lift the Galilean up by his armpits.

Then the procession divided into two parts. The first section consisted of Arsenius and the rebels, who put distance between themselves and the rest of the cortege. Another four executioners, two of these held the Rabbi aloft, followed five or ten meters behind. Lastly, Simon, a native of Cyrene, which is a country in North Africa, between Egypt and Tripolitania, brought up the rear.

During the time that Christ was hanging on the cross, I took the opportunity to exchange some words with this Cyrenian whom the centurions choose for his physical strength. According to his account, Longinus spotted him when he was in the company of his friends and pilgrims, who were also from Cyrene, travelling along the road from Jaffa where the campsite that served as their provisional lodging was situated, on their way to the Temple. Since he was Jewish, his intention was to help with the official ceremonies that Friday. Yet his plan was ruined by the Roman officer's unexpected summons.

Therefore, he did not come from a farm as numerous biblical commentators have asserted in their explanations. Simon, like many other pilgrims, had come to observe Passover and had not pre-arranged better lodgings, so he had pitched his tent very close to the city wall. Hence Mark (15:21) was in error when it stated that he was 'coming from the field.'

I suppose, at that time Jesus was practically unknown to Simon from Cyrene. Yes, he had heard about his miracles and healings, but at that historical moment, the Son of Man's tragedy had not affected him at all. After he finished what they ordered him to do, he lingered near the crosses for some time out of pure curiosity. However years later, he as well as his sons, Alexander and Rufus, became active proselytizers of the gospel in North Africa.

Surrounded by the whistling sandstorm, the soldiers crossed the road, determined to cover the final meters that separated them from the site for the execution. The men who helped the Nazarene had passed their arms around his shoulders and held the prisoner by his waist and both of his wrists. With his current disability, he bent his right leg with difficulty and his left leg was useless. This ravaged human being was salvaged and transported to the plateau at Golgotha. To my reckoning this *Via Dolorosa*—there could never have been a better name for it—had spanned a total of approximately 480 meters.

It was 12:30 pm on Friday, April 7. I was half-blinded by the dust and dirt particles and on the verge of tripping over the calcareous rocks that were scattered throughout this site northwest of the city. Without knowing it, I found myself on the foot of the "Râs" or "Head",

which was also called Calvary and Golgotha¹. Although the visibility was still acceptable, the eddies of sand hindered my initial exploration of the place. It was only after the death of the Nazarene that the storm subsided and “freed” the sun from this singular phenomenon, which I recorded as passing at 13:30 hours, that I could analyze the areas where I was with a certain calmness.

The centurion and his men were very familiar with this rocky hill—since this is what it actually was—so they swiftly advanced to the top. The first and the largest of the crags (the formation consisted of two masses that were virtually contiguous) had a maximum height of six or seven meters, taking the level of the trail, which nearly lapped around the base of both promontories, as a reference.

As I climbed up the eroded layers of lime, my attention was immediately called to the scarcity of vegetation and the roundness of the hill. It is quite possible that the nakedness of the rock—which is apparent when it is observed from a distance, produced a flight of imagination in the residents of Jerusalem who named this boulder “skull”². Presumably, this location was ideal for this type of public execution. It rose a hundred meters from the west gate of Ephraim and, as I mentioned previously, was a short walking distance from the road to Jaffa. If they really wanted to impress the pilgrims and the residents of the Holy City, this constituted a notable point of interest.

As for the consensus on the dimensions of Golgotha or “Head”, I cite the “Râs” because this was the last explanation offered by Vincent, the prestigious archeologist. It is based on what was heard from an old resident of the neighborhood of the current Holy Sepulchre. The hillock was very spacious and large enough to hold crucifixions. I estimate it measured between 20 to 30 meters in diameter at its base. If the crown or peak is included, round up approximately 12 to 15 meters. The dimensions of the rock overlooking the north were significantly smaller.

¹ The name *Gulgultha* is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew word *Gulgoleth*, which means “skull.” By eliminating one of the l’s one obtains the Greek term Golgotha and the Syriac *Gugultha*. The Latin version is *Calvarium*, from this comes the final form “Calvary” [Major’s note].

² In the divers interpretations I studied during my training for the Trojan Horse mission, only one associates the shape of the large rock with the word “skull”, which seems the most plausible. And I am not wrong. For some, among them Saint Jerome, Golgotha took its name from the fact that it was the place where executions occurred and criminals were buried. This was a gross misconception, because the Jews had a habit of burying executed convicts in a communal grave or flinging them in ravines south of Jerusalem, in Gehenna or Hinnom, where dogs, rats or other animals devoured them. A second theory, which is even stranger than the previous one, alludes to an ancient legend, according to which, the promontory is so named because one can find Adam’s skull in an underground cavern. This one is believed by such eminent personalities as Origen Adamantius, Saint Athanasius, Saint Ambrose, Saint Paula, etc. A seer named Anna Emmerich, who also shared this sentiment, wrote the following in her book, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ: This is what I know in respect to the origin of the name Calvary. A mountain with this name appeared to me during the time of the prophet Elisha. Then it was not as it was in Jesus’ time. Then it was tall with many ramparts and caves that seemed to be tombs. I saw the prophet Elisha descended into one of these caverns (I don’t know if this was real or simply a vision). I watched him take a skull from a stone sepulcher where the bones were resting. There was someone at his side. I believe it was an angel, who said, “This is Adam’s skull.” The prophet wanted to take it, but his companion would not allow it. I saw some sparse strands of blonde hair on the skull. I also know that the prophet had been giving an account of what happened. So the place received the name ‘Calvary.’ Finally, I saw how Jesus’ cross was placed above Adam’s skull. With all due respect, to this clairvoyant, her “information” was not consistent with archeological studies nor the nature of the humble rock [Major’s note].*

Ultimately, this was going to be the scene for an entire series of tragedies and disturbing events. How can I describe this place and that moment? How can I convey Jesus of Nazareth's immense loneliness as he tread on Golgotha's stony baldness? Today as I face this part of my diary, I am on the point of abandoning it. My strength fails me and I shudder from the memories. If I return to relating the first "grand journey", it is out of my respect for the promise I made to my brother Eliseo... I hope that those who manage to read this testimony will forgive the poor quality of my language.

The ascent to the rounded platform (that I think I already mentioned measured twelve to fifteen meters in diameter) atop the crag, was very brief. The soldiers traveled along a type of channel on the east side, which was nothing other than a natural fissure that was an old crack in the enormous stone mass. Twenty paces were sufficient to cover the top area, which I resist qualifying as a "peak."

As soon as I stepped on the site, my spirit shrank. The gusts of wind increased their whistling and howling among the half dozen posts that were sunk firmly in the rock's fissures. These were the stakes, poles, or *staticulum*, which is what they called the vertical beam of the crosses! Was it fear I experienced when I saw these rough tree trunks? Now from a distance, I suppose it had to have been a combination of horror and disappointment. Horror for the black, sharp pointed profile and disappointment since, perhaps I had been influenced by countless traditions and religious images about the biblical cross as being par excellence, that I had mentally forged a picture, which was very different from what I saw before my eyes.

This one had nothing visibly in common with those majestic, polished, precise crosses that had been and still are depicted by churches and by nearly all of the universal masters of painting and religious imagery. In front of me, almost in the center of Golgotha's convex back, were six solitary, naked and mutilated "trees" with circular whitish scars where branches had flourished long ago. They still retained the rough ash colored bark characteristic of conifers with rivulets of solidified resin in tracks on their surface. Almost all of them had innumerable grooves on their lower parts which enabled one to view the solid surface of the wood. But at that moment, I could not guess their purpose.

The top of these vertical unsplit wooden poles, which ranged between three and four meters high, appeared to be very crudely sharpened. I conjectured that whoever was responsible for the scaffold had pretended to sharpen them to a point with a blunt machete. These sinister ghosts lined up in two nearly parallel rows in the only clearing. The ends of each one of the six trees had a cleft similar to that of a pitchfork. The poles in the first row were less than three meters apart. The other posts had been embedded in the ground four to five meters behind the first row.

One of these poles, which was located to the west, was tilted. Without a doubt, the wooden wedges used to anchor the tree had come loose. I also found it strange that two of them had a holes drilled in them at about meter from the ground with an iron bar inserted in it which went from one side of the cylindrical post to the other. The sediles, which is the only identifier that came to mind, had been installed in the pole left of the center of the first row, which is to say, the ones to the extreme east of the first row of poles. Then I did not know the location of the last sedile¹ would be particularly significant in the dialog between the Galilean and one of the Zealots.

¹ Essentially a "sedile" is a piece of wood or metal—generally iron—which was occasionally positioned on the lower part of the pillar. It was used when one wished to prolong the agony of the crucifixion. This

Jesus as well as the bandits stood staring at the logs for several minutes that seemed interminable. The silence that was broken by the storm was dramatically meaningful. However, this tense situation did not last for long. Seven of the soldiers took up positions around the first three trees; meanwhile the one who carried the leather sack quickly rummaged inside it and removed a series of tools. My blood froze in my veins when I saw a bunch of nails (I think I remember counting fifteen), two hammers with large square wooden heads, a pair of grimy pliers with leather covered handles, a meter long chain, and a short machete with a wide blade.

The terrorists, who were mesmerized at the foot of the posts soon left off being mute. Two members of the platoon began to loosen the rope which held the crossbar to the oldest Zealot. This was the spark that ignited his last attack of desperation and hysteria. Guessing that he had been selected to be the first victim, he began howling, beating the wood with his arms, and kicking the Roman mercenaries. Longinus seemed to expect his reaction. He gave an order to a third soldier who stood behind the convict and seized him by the hair, immobilizing him with a strong pull. Without losing a second, the centurion took one of the javelins, aimed the shaft at the prisoner's head and dealt him a sharp blow that made him lose consciousness.

Once he was untied, the man who had immobilized him finished by tearing off his battered tunic, while two other infantrymen held him upright. However, he did respect the criminal's loincloth. With a precision and dexterity that left me bewildered, these Romans stretched the prisoner out face up and extended (tautened would be a more exact term) his arms over the wood. Since the crossbar was perfectly cylindrical, each of the soldiers responsible for pulling his arms, knelt in front of one end of the log, holding it between his thighs and knees. This way they achieved an acceptable level of stability during the nailing procedure.

When the executioners considered the crossbar was stabilized, they nodded and the soldier in charge of restraining the prisoner to the headboard also knelt on the white rock. He gripped the criminal's head between his muscular knees so that they were practically glued to his ears. Simultaneously, as a final security measure, which seemed unnecessary for this inert bandit, a fourth mercenary held his ankles together and wrapped the chain around them.

The soldier who was stationed behind the criminal, restraining his head, chose one of the large nails he had previously tucked inside his belt. One of the massive mallets lay to his right resting on Golgotha's crust. The Teacher appeared to be unattended. He had fallen to his knees at Calvary, and remained in the same position inside a circle formed by the platoon and the front of the poles. I think he had not yet started to contemplate this scene. His head and his gaze were directed toward the ground and he stayed in this position without making any demands of Longinus or his men.

With a meticulousness characteristic of a professional who had extensive experience in this dismal occupation, the Roman executioner picked up the nail with his right hand and probed the area from the carpels or left wrist to the face of the palm with its sharp point. He noted the location of the radial artery and the medial cubital vein, then he pressed the latter gently. Once satisfied, he made a small scratch on the skin; moved the nail to his other hand and placed it vertically on the selected point. He immediately grasped the hammer and glanced up at the officer, awaiting the authorization to strike. Longinus assented with a slight inclination of his

piece, which could have various shapes—from a simple iron bar to a wooden block—passed through the structure like a horn. The criminal could rest his feet and consequently the weight of his body on it. Tertullian mentions it once, calling it the *sedilis excelsus* or elevated seat [Major's note].

head and the executioner brought the mace closer until it softly touched the copper base. Next he lifted the mallet until it was above his right ear, then he forcefully swung it onto the nail.

The eight millimeter square section cleanly penetrated the wrists and broke through the wooden crossbar. The nail, which was 20 to 25 centimeters long, had tilted a little as it buried in the carpels. Now its head pointed towards the fingers. At that moment, with my heartbeat accelerating, I did not notice a detail that would say much in favor of the executor's skill...

With a second blow—which was considerably less violent than the first—the nail entered a bit deeper. The head of the nail had been about ten centimeters from the skin. The blood was delayed two or three seconds before it spurted out. The guerilla, who was still unconscious, did not react. So the executioner rapidly repeated the operation on the right wrist. This time he did not even look at the centurion. Two more hard blows with the hammer were sufficient to attach the convict to the wood.

Oddly, the base of the nail returned to an oblique position. Then I realized how the thumbs of both hands had suddenly moved toward the center of the palms. Yet the remaining fingers had barely flexed. (I directed the ultrasound at the Teacher's wrists so I could formulate a hypothesis—which was confirmed by subsequent anatomical studies—as to the cause of this effect.)

Now that the Zealot's wrists were pierced, two glugs of blood gradually emerged, rolling down the tree's bark and forming two puddles on the rock. Although the hemorrhage did not merit concern, the sight of the blood and the nailing of his companion caused in the younger terrorist's diminished nervous system to breakdown. With a pleading expression on his face, he managed to crawl on his knees to Longinus. As soon as he was at Longinus' feet, he sank his head to the ground and screaming for mercy. For a tenth of a second, the centurion's eyes clouded over with a shadow of pity. He lifted his hands in a sign of helplessness and ensuring that the criminal did not perceive him, asked the closest foot soldier for his *pilum*. Longinus could not avoid crucifying the teenager, but he could spare him from suffering the pain of feeling the nails hammered into his wrists. Hence he raised his javelin with both hands as he prepared to strike the terrified convict on the head.

“Stop! Who are you looking for?”

A shout from one of the sentinels cut short the officer's plan. He turned and saw a group of six or seven women climbing the monticle via the crevice with resolute steps. Longinus forgot about the culprit and advanced towards the Hebrews. The women exchanged some words with the centurion as they showed him a small red earthenware jug. The head of the platoon quelled his men and allowed the women to reach the top of Calvary.

Once they had arrived at the summit, the woman who was carrying the jug approached the guerilla that had just been nailed to the crossbar. A second woman followed her and the rest stood in silence at the edge of the scaffold, protected from the steely gusts of wind by their wide black and green mantles. On observing that the man lying down was unconscious, the determined woman returned to Longinus.

In anticipation of their wish, the centurion motioned to the second bloodstained criminal who was crying frenetically under the weight of the crossbar. But before the Daughters of Jerusalem opened the narrow mouthed pitcher to fulfill the advice from the book of Proverbs: ‘Give strong drink to those who are about to perish and wine to the bitter soul,’ the officer

indicated that his men should finish by elevating the first bandit. The ladder was propped against one of the sediles in the first row (the one located to the west) as the other pair of soldiers hoisted the log that had the condemned man nailed to it not without some difficulty. Without delay, the executioner who was responsible for the nailing, tied a rope around the man's chest and swiftly made two knots, one at each end of the crossbar. Finally, he took pride in his consummate skill by topping the tie with a central bow.

A fourth soldier climbed to the top of the ladder while a few others supported the guerilla as he was moved to the base of the vertical piece of wood. The man who made the anchor passed the rope to his colleague on the ladder and he slipped it into the groove at the top of the tree. Right away, he started pulling the thick rope with the assistance from the ground by the *optio*. At each tug, the contact between the rope and the post emitted a high-pitched screech that mingled with the second Zealot's rending shrieks. In a question of a minute and a half, the crossbar was hoisted to its highest elevation. Longinus' deputy tightened the rope as much as possible and before the Roman who had ascended the ladder tied the heavy rope, three infantrymen who were guarding the convict's ascent, came to help Arsenius hold the man and the crossbar in the air.

On untying the rope, the soldier who was on the higher part caught the two ends of the bow and lifted the beam towards the tip of the pole. Once the crossbar was threaded, the soldier shouted and four Romans released the long end. With a creaking sound, the log slipped down until it fit in the vertical post.

The bandit's body also dropped like a weight, causing his arms stretch to a maximum angle of 65° with respect to the pole. This terrifying braking tore the edges of the wounds in his hands and strained the ligaments in the joints in his shoulders and elbows. The pain must have been unbearable since the unfortunate man responded by regaining consciousness. His eyes bulged out of their sockets. However, the force of the position had almost blocked his respiratory system and, from the sight of his contorted mouth, I surmised he could not make a sound.

Nevertheless, the soldiers did not seem to be in an excessive rush. Prior to descending the ladder, the mercenary took the mallet and aimed several hard blows at the crossbar to secure it in place. Then he proceeded to take the small board out of the *optio*'s hands from which he read the name Gistas and nailed it to the upper part of the newly formed cross, a quarter of the way above the transverse beam.

The two hundred inquisitive people who had followed the platoon and taken positions around the rock, erupted into shouts and exclamations of protest when they read what the soldiers had finished nailing up for the Zealot's "INRI." Indeed, Longinus was right. If the procession had ventured through the streets in Jerusalem with these two "partisans", who knows what the populace would have been capable of doing.

The initial group of Jewish observers was gradually multiplying by the addition of other pilgrims who were coming and going along the road to Jaffa. Nearby, in the first row, which was about ten meters along a straight line I could distinguished various Sadducees. Judas Iscariot was among them with his head covered by a mantle. (I do not know if he wore it because he was afraid of possible reprisals from the Teacher's friends and followers or if he wanted to protect himself, like the many other onlookers, from the turbulent sand which buffeted them outside the city.) When I saw the traitor, I honestly wanted to descend from Golgotha and join him. His strange suicide was one of the events I wished to clarify. Regardless, the mission clearly specified that I should not be separated from Jesus during these critical moments.

The man in charge of the nailing caught the mallet in flight and set his right knee on the ground in front of the condemned man. He extracted another nail from his belt and gestured to his companions. One of them grasped the criminal's right foot, stretching the leg so that it fit against the flat surface of the post. This maneuver left one of the tarsus bones—the astragalus—which served as the executioner's customary point of reference close to the skin. He positioned the nail above the said bone and sewed it into the wood with a single stroke. The pain climbed up Gistas' body instantly transforming into a howl.

This howling was followed by a series of interrupted temper tantrums. The zealot's diaphragm had started to be impaired, consequently his respiration entered an anguished decline. In a few minutes, between rages, the desperate criminal began gasping, thus multiplying his short dramatic inhalations. These screams were a mixture of fright, pain, and rage, that pulled the teenage terrorist out of his isolation. He barely raised his head, glanced at his companion, paled and commenced sweating.

The legionaries finished nailing the prisoner's left foot 10 to 15 centimeters above his right foot. The blood ran down the vertical pole in abundance, provoking intense heaves in the second guerilla who vomited soon afterwards. Longinus urged his men to untie Dismas. Unhappy and trembling with fear, the man did not offer any resistance. Once he was naked and bathed in a cold sweat, the centurion gave a sign for the women to administer the concoction. But before that, four mercenaries surrounded the criminal as they thrust the points of their javelins into his kidneys, back, and abdomen. The bandit's shaking increased and his knees began to shake. Affected by the prisoner's contagious terror, the Jewish women's hands trembled as they filled a deep wooden cup with the greenish yellow liquid from the jug.

I brought the beverage close to myself in order to smell it. Among its ingredients I identified the scent peculiar to bile or bull's bile. Since I was interested in the nature of the mixture, the woman who held the container, pointed at me with a certain fear. Perhaps she was confusing me with a prestigious foreigner. It was made of a base of diluted wine to which the contents of one or several gall bladders from recently sacrificed oxen were added. Far from containing some type of drug or soporific, the Hebrews' use of this for those in need was well known and natural. First, they prepared the bile extract by tossing the contents of the said gall bladders into a cloth filter. Next, they evaporated it in a double boiler while stirring it. This way they obtain the desired extract that can be kept indefinitely.

When this pious "association" of women received news of an execution, they poured the ox bile into wine or spirits with a high concentration of alcohol. The lightening metabolic action of the bile liberated the alcohol from the wine and produced a rapid and significant inebriation in the criminal. This dulled his brain, alleviated his suffering to a certain degree and enervated or weakened his entire consciousness.

Matthew was the only one who accurately related this in a passage in the gospel. Mark (15:23) states that the women gave Jesus 'wine with myrrh' to taste. This is inaccurate. Since, among other reasons, myrrh is a natural stimulant, tonic, and emmenagogue, it probably would have reacted in a way contrary to what was desired. (At that time, it was generally employed as a balsam, a pomade, for certain tumors in the joints, a toothpaste, and above all, as a perfume.)

The woman put her right hand over the wooden bowl to prevent the dust and dirt being blown by the wind from contaminating the wine. She looked at Longinus and he pointed to the prisoner again, thereby authorizing her to approach him. The woman went to Dismas and gave

him the beverage. Spurred by fright, the boy did not respond. His eyes, which were red from crying, gave the centurion a questioning look.

“Drink!” Longinus ordered.

The Zealot raised his arms and accepted the large cup. But his convulsions were so pronounced that he spilled part of the liquid. At last, he managed to bring the container to his lips and quickly finish off the 250 or 300 cubic centimeters that it held. The Hebrew women withdrew and joined the rest of the group, and the prisoner was guided by shoves to the front of one of the two sediles in the first row, which had the crossbar (it had been moved) resting at its base.

Dismas was held with his back to the three trees while two executioners stretched his arms out behind him and a third tripped him so he fell backwards to lie supine. The centurion stood behind the criminal with his javelin ready to strike the prisoner’s head, if needed. He lifted the tip of the *pilum* and waited.

However, the terrorist hardly resisted. Apparently, he had accepted his fate. Besides, fear had stiffened his muscles. As he reclined on the log, he looked up and began calling out for his mother in a thin voice. But his incessant calls disappeared when the executioner pierced him with the first blow of the hammer. A chill rose over the rock. The crowd received the new nailing with strong protests and pity.

With his eyes bulging, the anterior and posterior muscles in his neck tensing like violin strings, the quivering prisoner let his head fall back against the wooden beam. Instantly, a pungent stench was wafted by the wind. The soldier who held the prisoner’s feet with the chain exploded with a thousand insults and curses against the Zealot. Pressured by an insurmountable panic, the boy’s sphincter had opened, releasing his excrement.

When his right wrist was perforated, the teenager lost consciousness. The executioners took his unconscious state as an opportunity to accelerate the process of putting him up on the pole. Once they were ready to hoist the crossbar, a doubt arose. Which of the two free beams should they use to crucify him? The infantrymen asked the officer and he shrugged. The man who was in charge of the nailing provided a solution that was well received by everyone.

“I say we put the ‘king’ in the center,” he quipped with amusement.

And that is the way it was done. That was the reason the so-called “thieves” were on the Teacher’s right and left side.

When the executioner turned the guerilla’s left foot, he did it so that his toes rested on one of the arms of the iron sedile, which went through the tree from one side to the other. This circumstance granted Dismas a measure of relief when he was fighting for a few deeper breaths of air. In contrast, his left foot was attached somewhat lower on the front of the post. The second “arm” of the sedile—which was parallel to the crossbar, similar to Jesus’ cross—was not used. In my opinion, this relative rest decisively influenced the crucifixion to the extent that it permitted a better level of oxygenation, which consequently produced a greater clarity in his thoughts.

At the conclusion of Dismas’ crucifixion, the sweaty, bloodstained soldiers recovered the cord that had been used to lift the culprit and stared at Jesus of Nazareth. My heart shuddered anew as I discerned the sardonic smiles on the Romans’ faces. It was 13:00 hours.

Eliseo's sudden interruption momentarily distracted me. The module had detected the eye of the sirocco just over fifteen minutes away from Jerusalem. The haboob's velocity had decreased slightly, but it was still dragging a tremendous amount of sand. It raised tongues of particles 2,000 and 2,500 meters above the ground. My partner was more concerned about the possibility that wind in this dry storm would spread active biological agents that could affect me, than he was about its severity.

Frankly, I was not worried about Eliseo's warning. My heart and my five senses were four meters away focusing on the body of the 1.81 meters tall man who was now bent and battered. The Teacher was moved without any further delay. The purple mantle that was still on his shoulders and fastened at its high neckline was carried off, broaching on the clothing underneath. As it untwisted, the top part of his tunic was exposed.

On seeing it, I closed my eyes. It was stained, shapeless, blood soaked, and glued to his body at the sites of the wounds from the flogging. I swallowed hard. What would happen the moment he was undressed? Nevertheless, this harrowing crisis was deferred by a problem that no one had counted on: the helmet of thorns. Just as one of the soldiers prepared to remove the tunic, another one of the guards noticed the braid of thorns, observing that either the garment would tear or the helmet had to be taken off first.

The infantrymen were entangled in an argument. I suppose it might have continued indefinitely had it not been for the *optio*. With more of a sense of pragmatism than any of his men, he merely touched the fabric and, realizing it was a seamless tunic, ordered the executioners to strip Jesus of his "crown". At first, this appeared to be an absurd discussion about a situation with an easy drastic solution: simply rip off the tunic. Then I understood. Apparently, there was an "unofficial" custom for executioners to divide an executed criminal's clothes between themselves¹.

Accordingly, one of the Romans stood facing Jesus and slowly slipped his fingers into two hollows in the helmet. When his hands had grasped the bundle of rushes at the level of Jesus' ears, he gave a violent jerk upward. The Galilean trembled. But, in the end, the thorny helmet did not come off. Some of the long sharp barbs were solidly embedded in his flesh and this first attempt only succeeded in further tearing his tissues, causing the birth of new trickles of blood.

Arsenius shook his head impatiently, reminding the soldier that he must first stretch it horizontally and then pull it upwards. The Nazarene pursed his lips together and waited for the second tug. As he pulled it to the sides, many of the thorns in the frontal and parietal zones broke off. The executioner repeated the maneuver. The vertical yank was so forceful that the helmet jumped, but the thorns over his cheeks and nape scratched the skin, two of the spines lodged in his swollen right cheek and the left levator labii superioris muscle and broke off from the crown so they were left embedded in both sides of his face.

A moan accompanied this brutal attempt and the Sadducees who were hovering around the Teacher welcomed this action with acclamations and applause. Before the Rabbi had the opportunity to recover from this new acute pain, two of the soldiers raised his arms while a third proceeded to undress him by lifting the bottom edge of the tunic. I felt my heartbeat accelerate as his legs were exposed. They were completely crisscrossed with streams of coagulated blood, blue

¹ It had been an official tradition called the *propino* or "the tip" since the time of Emperor Hadrian (117-138 BC) who made a decree for it that was collected in *The Pandects* [Major's note].

bruises, split hematomas, and a myriad of small circles. The nails on the bottom of the Romans' sandals had produced the majority of the circles.

As for his knees, the left one was extremely swollen. Although his right leg was the least disfigured, the anterior surface of his kneecap was split so wide open from the multiple gashes and the loss of subcutaneous tissue that I could even see part of the bone's periosteum. It was incomprehensible how this human had continued to walk and drag himself on his knees to the rampart.

I admit that his strength started to fail him again, but the martyrdom had not even begun. Once I heard the sound of the tunic being ripped from the skin of Jesus' torso, I paled. I have no doubt the mercenary verified that the fabric was attached to the wounds. He turned his head and grinned maliciously at his companions as he raised the undergarment slowly, tearing the linen away from Christ's injuries, pulling large patches of dried blood along with it. I reddened with anger and clenched "Moses' staff" until I was nearly crushing it. Huge drops of sweat started to roll down my temples. I had to bite the sleeve of my mantle so I would not jump on these sadists.

Finally, when the Nazarene's undergarment was lifted to the level of his face, the soldiers lowered the Rabbi's head and arms and removed his last piece of clothing. The Son of Man was completely naked, slightly stooped and bathed with new hemorrhages. Longinus was perplexed when he saw how Jesus' back was boiling with hematomas and lacerations. Unsticking the tunic had opened many of his wounds producing ostentatious bloody eruptions.

Despite the undeniable protection provided by the tunic's two layers, the wood had abraded his upper back, ulcerating the regions around his right shoulder blade and the skin above his left trapezius muscle. I observed an area of inflammation measuring approximately nine by six centimeters in the latter section with jagged edges and curling skin. This was probably the result of some of the violent falls (perhaps the second one where he fell on his back in the tunnel at Antonia's Fortress).

His elbows were also all but destroyed from blows and tumbles. In regard to his left forearm, the friction from contact with the crossbar's bark shredded his flat muscle and caused him to lose fluid while it created large bruised zones. However, his sides presented the most horrific sight. The kicks had burst a number of the hematomas and lacerated many of the muscle fibers vital to respiratory function. Once again, the blood flowed down this wrecked human being who, now divested of his clothes, began to shiver as he was dashed by the dust and wind. This man's helplessness, abandonment, and bitterness reached one of its culminating points at that instant.

The spectators and people passing by, who had augmented the initial group of witnesses, intervened in these dramatic moments with jeers and long guffaws at the Galilean's nakedness. Above all, the priests were the most caustic. Some of them were even leaping over the boulders below Golgotha, gesticulating and mimicking Jesus, who stood humiliated with his head hung down and both of his hands covering his pubic region.

Freed from the grip of the helmet of thorns, his hair began to float in the wind, revealing the marks from Lucilius' whip on his ears. In spite of the 17.5 °C temperature recorded by the module for Jerusalem at that hour, the Teacher was still shivering from the cold. Left without the protection of his clothes, wide areas on his arms, chest, abdomen, and legs had the well-known texture of chicken skin. Instead of relenting, the fever continued to attack him. How far this was

from the Galilean's majestic figure! Though his friends and disciples were not present, I am convinced that very few of them would have recognized him.

The pain, thirst, and exhaustion must have been unbearable, however when I contemplated him there alone outraged without the most fleeting respite or sign of friendship or deep respect, the genuine, true, and most profound torture was not physical suffering, but I reiterate, a feeling of moral annihilation which always invades a man who is unjustly condemned. Anyway, these are only the personal reflections of an observer. Who could guess Jesus of Nazareth's thoughts under these circumstances? What was certain was that his end was very near.

While the soldiers arranged the crossbar around the central pole, Longinus turned to the group of women and invited them to repeat their administrations of the bile and wine with the Rabbi. So the same Hebrew women walked quickly to the Teacher. As the one who carried the drink separated from the rest of her companions, the young John Mark appeared right behind her. I do not know how he managed to get there, but before he could do something crazy, I made a sign for him to come to me.

The women filled the wooden cup a second time and offered the foul smelling liquid to Jesus. The Nazarene raised his head and looked at the women. Surprised by the convict's silence, she made a slight motion with the container encouraging him to drink. Yet the hunched over giant was not persuaded. His hands had not moved away from his genitals. Respecting the Galilean's modesty, she held the concoction to his lips and tilted the receptacle so he could drink without using his hands.

The Teacher half-opened his mouth, barely tasting the beverage. No sooner had he tasted it and recognized its nature, than he drew back his face and shook his head. The prisoner's attitude astonished both the women and the centurion. They glanced at Longinus and he shrugged, considering it the end of the matter.

John Mark's face lit up when he saw me. He raced across the few meters that separated us and hugged me. Both of his cheeks were streaked with unmistakable signs of crying. The little one whimpered and in the middle of an attack of hiccups, begged me to save his Teacher. There was nothing I could do but smile. How could I explain who I was and describe my mission? I am not going to hide the fact that throughout that Friday I did consider the possibility. What would have happened if, while I was in the center of the promontory, I ordered Eliseo to mobilize the module and set out for Golgotha? It would have been the easiest thing to descend to the rock and snatch the Galilean out of the platoon's claws. Yet these were only impossible dreams...

Before the boy could catch soldiers' attention, I induced him to go far away from there and take responsibility for a task that would have very important repercussions for me in a few hours. John Mark did not understand why, but he obeyed. Alerted by one of the soldiers that were guarding the area around the scaffold, the *optio* approached us and politely, but with a firmness that left no doubt, advised me that he would toss the boy out. It was not necessary for him to repeat it because John Mark instantly slipped away by blending in with the women who were already descending Golgotha.

Next, I espied him with Judas Iscariot just as I had requested. I was confounded by Jesus' rejection of the spirits fortified with bile. When he opened his mouth, his tongue, which was as dry as a scourer, as well as the mucous membranes were crying out in anguish, tormented by dehydration. His lips were cracked like the hull of an old stranded ship; it must have been an dreadful suffocating thirst. I could not comprehend how the Teacher could have turned his face

away from the bowl of wine. If he did this—as I suspected—to maintain the maximum functionality of his compromised lucidity, it would only acquaint me with his courage for the umpteenth time.

“It’s time,” the centurion prompted.

And, with his hands hiding his testicles, the submissive Nazarene began to crawl rather than walk to the crosses. Longinus and another soldier took him by his arms and escorted him along. A cold sweat began to cover me. The guerilla who had been nailed up first continued howling and writhing from time to time, but the soldiers were not paying him the least amount of attention.

The executioner who was in charge of the nailing knelt in front of the crossbar as he waited with one of those terrifying blacksmith’s nails in his right hand. It was virtually the same as the ones he used earlier: being about twenty centimeters long—perhaps a little longer—with a point that was not as sharp as the ones on its “brothers”. An additional detail distinguished it from its predecessors. Specifically, a section of the square had deteriorated noticeably, forming a slightly jagged edge with teeth.

The soldiers positioned the Teacher with his back to the log, drawing his arms apart and pushing him to the ground, while a third soldier tripped him. This time, the condemned man’s extreme weakness was more than enough to accelerate his fall. Once the Teacher’s shoulder blades were against the wood, the executioners put the Teacher’s arms on the crossbar, simultaneously holding the ends of the rough cylinder in place with their knees. His hands palms were up with his fingers slightly flexed, trembling and spattered with dried blood, like his upper and lower arms.

His left leg was swollen up to his knee and still bent, however the soldier who held the chain, carefully straightened it by curtly smacking the kneecap with his hand. The Galilean gasped in reaction to the pain, yet he did not emit a groan. Longinus stood in his routine position by the subdued prisoner’s head, with the shaft of his *pilum* aimed at Jesus’s forehead. The Nazarene’s hair touched the rock.

The principle executioner’s assistants, stretched the Galilean’s arms, but the one on the left end of the log unsheathed his sword and used his blade to flatten the Teacher’s four fingers. Apparently, this “innovation” facilitated the task of attaching the convict’s upper extremities to the crossbar. If the prisoner attempted to struggle he would clutch the sharp blade which would cut him irremissibly. These mercenaries’ degree of cruelty and expertise seemed to have no limit.

To a given extent, the numerous trails of blood that bathed the Nazarene’s thick forearms hindered the search for his veins. At last, the executioner appeared to have distinguished between the bluish lines of Jesus’ veins and the arteries; he marked the point chosen for the perforation. Just before looking up at the centurion, the soldier who prepared to hammer in the nail, gave his companions a rubiconic glance with his eyebrows lifted significantly to share his surprise at the King of the Jews’ exceedingly bazaar docility. The others, who were equally astonished, responded with identical grimaces.

Longinus had grown tired of holding his javelin up, so he lowered it. He authorized the first blow with a small nod. The executioner positioned the nail completely perpendicular to the middle of Jesus’ wrist, at the level of the Nazarene’s carpal bones, then he swung it straight onto

the head of the nail. Although the point was blunt, it was instantly lost inside the tissue. The skin around the metal exploded like a flower, swiftly blossoming into a dense corona of blood.

When the tip of the nail cut through the tendons, bones, and veins, it must have grazed a median nerve, which is one of the most sensitive nerves in the body, because it produced a painful shock difficult to understand. At the same time that his arms contacted, Jesus' head jerked upwards remaining tense as it shook from side to side parallel to the ground. His teeth clenched for a few seconds, then, as his mouth opened and everyone logically expected a shrill scream; he limited himself to inhaling in short gasping breaths.

The soldiers, who were waiting for a more violent reaction, could not leave off being amazed. At last, routed by the pain, the Teacher let his head fall backwards, where it hit the rock. All of us thought he had lost consciousness, but within seconds, he opened his right eye and breathed faster.

Why had I not noticed this much earlier! Jesus was only inhaling through his mouth. I presumed this was due to some problem with his nasal septum—resulting from the punches—which made inspiration through his nose difficult. The executioner changed his location so that he was bending over Jesus' right arm. However, the second piercing was going to present some complications...

As for the Nazarene's left wrist, the blood had started to flow so exceptionally slowly that it formed a red bracelet. Evidently, the nail was serving as a stopper, bringing about hemostasis or stopping the blood loss. Nonetheless, the scant hemorrhage was a double-edged weapon. Doctors know that the pain increases in these situations.

Arsenius and the officer stared at each other, unable to comprehend the absence of screams and classic thrashing around that was typical for all men who knew they were on the brink of death. On the contrary, this prisoner, who was far from causing any trouble, had started awakening a deep admiration in Longinus and his deputy. This was in contrast to the Zealot who hung on the cross, rending the air with his bellowing and swearing that was so extraordinary that the officer, who realized he was still holding his javelin, flung it violently at the base of the cross in sudden indignation.

The hammer's second blow was as accurate as the first. The nail was also tilted with its head facing the Teacher's fingers. Yet instead of penetrating the wooden crossbar and continuing in the direction of his elbow, part of it barely grazed the log. At the second nailing, the Rabbi did not even lift his head. Thick drops of sweat had started sliding down his temples, colliding with coagulated blood here and there as they progressed. He restricted himself to opening his mouth to its maximum and emitting one muffled unintelligible guttural noise.

"What happened?" inquired the centurion on seeing how the nail protruded more than fourteen centimeters above the Jesus' right wrist.

The executioner detached the arm from the log, examined the wood's concave surface, passed his fingers over the bark. He shook his head in annoyance, then he turned to Longinus and explained that he had hit a knot in the wood. I felt how my insides burned. Without losing his calm, the executioner settled down again in order to bore the wrist above the crossbar. He grasped the edges of the nail between his thumb and index finger as he prepared to overcome the resistance of any inconvenient obstacle with a new blow. The impact was so hard that a broken pyramidal section of the nail remained barely a centimeter above the criminal's bloody skin.

This new mishap arrived with a vulgar imprecation from the soldier. He threw the mallet aside, ordering his colleagues to hold Jesus' forearm. Then he clenched what he could of the end of the metal and with a great effort tried to pull out what remained of the nail. It was in vain. The point had advanced enough to pierce the knot and the metal resisted. The angry soldier stood up while proffering new curses. He stepped on Jesus' radial cubital area with his left sandal and commenced to remove the nail by wrenching it from side to side.

Even Longinus paled when he saw this new mutilation. As the executioner searched for the rest of the metal, his brusque tugs widened the orifice in Jesus' wrist, tearing tissue, and inundating his own fingers, the rock, and the crossbar with blood. It is quite possible the pain was somewhat diminished by the profuse bleeding. Otherwise, I could not explain the Galilean's behavior.

At each of the soldier's pendular movements in his zeal to extract the piece of metal, Jesus responded with a moan. Five, six...eight jerks and as many groans were accompanied by panting and various head motions. But the giant did not break; he did not protest... Finally, after an eternity, the executioner removed the tip of the nail from the log. Once he had pulled the small metallic dripping red bar out of Jesus' wrist, he went to his bag and rummaged around inside it.

The moment he returned to the Nazarene's side, I noticed he was carrying a special type of bore with a short wooden handle. He moved the Galilean's arm aside and after spitting on the bloodstain that covered the wood, he cleaned the area where the knot was located. Next, he picked up the tool and inserted its spiral thread into the depression started by the nail. He leaned his entire body weight on the handle while turning the stem of the iron drill with a slow but firm motion, boring into the almost stony rough wrinkled surface.

The operation was laborious. Meanwhile, the Rabbi's blood continue running out, forming a wide puddle on Golgotha's white surface. Judging from the velocity of the escaping torrent, I did not think the nail's serrated edge scratched any of his arteries or major veins. Even so, the loss was becoming dramatic. Jesus grew paler by the minute and I feared he was entering a new state of shock.

When the soldier reckoned he had adequately drilled the crossbar, he searched in his belt and selected another nail. First, he inspected its head and tip. Once satisfied, he moved the criminal's forearm to the starting position. However, contrary to what I expected, he inserted the nail into the huge hole in Jesus' wrist before he seized the mallet. As soon as the point touched the wood, the executioner inserted it into the hole he had just made, only then did he repeat the hammering. Presently, the knot was conquered and the nail entered the log without any problems.

With a second blow, the Teacher's right arm was definitely affixed. As with the left wrist, the base of the nail did not touch his flesh. The heads of both nails jutted out eight to ten centimeters: hours later, I would understand why. At the same time that his wrists registered the nailing, Christ's thumbs bent, jumped, and repositioned themselves toward the center of his palms in the opposite direction to his four slightly flexed fingers, which is identical to what occurred with the other guerrillas.

Although the oval-shaped wound in his left wrist scarcely measured 15 by 19 millimeters, the one in his right was much more formidable. It was almost twenty-five millimeters long with respect to the axis defined by his forearm. This width made me fear for the Teacher's stability once he was elevated on the vertical pole. Would the tissue rip?

The soldiers obeyed the officer. There had been an excessive delay. So with the *optio's* help, the others hoisted the crossbar with the crucified man attached to it, tightening the rope a little to prevent it from twisting as they raised him to the top of the tree. Once they passed the thick rope through the gap at the very top of the vertical post, and it started to stretch, the crossbar, which the mercenaries closely controlled so it did not lose its horizontal position, commenced its ponderous, exasperating ascent.

The way strong gusts of wind slashed Jesus' body with successive loads of dust and dirt made it increasingly difficult to lift him. The centurion shouted, commanding the presence of the two men who were maintaining the security on Golgotha. They were to distribute themselves at the foot of the ladder and support the soldier who pulled from the top of the pole. While the Galilean kept his feet on the rock, the position of his arms could stay, more or less, along the axis of the crossbar. Gradually his head recovered a vertical bearing; occasionally it fell onto his manubrium at the top of his sternum. In the process of one of the pulls, after a sharp inhalation of a mouthful of air, Jesus briefly lifted his head and stared at the turbulent sky.

"Father...! Forgive them...! They don't know what they are doing!" he exclaimed.

The soldiers paused when they heard his broken voice. The Teacher had spoken in Aramaic. I think with the exception of one or two soldiers, the majority did not understand him. Regrettably, they asked what it meant. The pair who understood exchanged a look and before they could translate the prisoner's words, one of the soldiers slapped Jesus across the face.

"Damned Hebrew!" muttered the man who struck him, "Neither your death nor your life are worthy of pity!"

The translator's version was correct; yet the uneducated mercenary wrongly interpreted the words.

"So we don't know what we're doing," yelled the man who bore the holes. "Well, you just wait and see!"

Then he stalked to the center of Calvary, retrieved the thorny helmet from the ground and promptly returned to his place before the Galilean. Although the centurion had surely understood the sentiment of the statement, he hesitated when faced with his men's angry feelings. I suppose he did not dare intervene. Essentially, he too felt offended by what seemed to be a taunt aimed at his professionalism. The executioner pulled Jesus' head forward so that it was away from the crossbar and, in a swift motion, foisted the thorny cap on his head in one stroke. He did not use excessive force when he adjusted the springy mass so that it danced above the prisoner's temples. Perhaps this was because he was afraid of being injured by the thorns.

At that moment, the crowd ranged between two to three thousand people, who howled with pleasure at the Roman's gesture. The Teacher stood with his head bowed as his torturers continued raising the crossbar. Jesus' great height and weight—which was possibly eighty kilograms—formed another impediment for the sweaty executioners who were quick to encourage each other by accompanying each pull with as many "hey's". With every palm over palm, the rope tugged the crucified man on an overwhelming, interminable ascent. To top it off, the increasingly excited multitude joined the executioners' interjections, cheering them on with their "hey's."

Except the powerful arms of the three soldiers who heaved from the ground and from atop the ladder were not enough. Fearing that the prisoner and the wood were going to crash to the ground, Arsenius and Longinus had no alternative but to team up with the soldiers, adding their strength to the hoisting effort.

“Hey...hey!”

At last, the Galilean’s body took off from the rock and commenced its devastating “countdown” to spine chilling agony. As the giant lost the support of this feet, his arms stretched and for a while the cracking sound of his bones combined with the creaking sound of the thick rope as it passed through the fork in the vertical pole.

Just then, his clavicles, sternum, and ribs stood out in a bas-relief, as streams of blood viciously carved a path along his neck, the pectoralis major muscles near his shoulders, and his arms. Yet the strength of these muscles was still great; they prevented the dislocation of his shoulders and elbows. The muscle fibers in his forearms, especially the extensors muscles of the hands and fingers, tapered like a sabers. I closed my eyes afraid they would pop out during one of the pulls.

“Hey!”

Now Jesus hung a half a meter from the ground. Presently the force of gravity caused his body weight to rotate his arms until they formed a 65° angle with the pole at first instant of his absolute suspension¹. The formidable weight that the Nazarene supported by each of his gored wrists, together with the bursting wounds, and the extreme tension in the ligaments in his shoulders and elbows, must have multiplied his pain (assuming he had any remaining capacity for it) to the point of madness. On several occasions when he was fended in by the suffering, he threw back his head, searching for air and, above all, a point for support. However, these points could only be found in one place—better said—in two: on the nails that passed through his carpels. How could he rise above the pieces of metal from which he was suspended?

With every backward motion of his skull, the thorns became more and more embedded in his occipital region, until they caused the Teacher to give up. These successive defeats of his attempts to win a few grams of oxygen were transforming his respiration into an agitated, arrhythmic rattle in his chest was decreasingly effective. The phantom of asphyxiation had begun to glide over the Son of Man...

“Hey...Hey!”

When the soldiers halted their arduous progress with the rope, Jesus’ body was hanging about ninety to one hundred centimeters from the ground. His feet, which were striped with blood, groped for and beat desperately against the bark of the vertical trunk. Nevertheless, the hemorrhages started to trickle one after another, so that in a question of minutes, the front of the tree was dyed red, saturated from the area behind his scapulae to his heels.

¹ A simple calculation gives us a terrifying image of the weight Jesus of Nazareth had to bear during this excruciating elevation. Dividing the Teacher’s total weight between both of his arms, which is about forty kilograms each, is equal to a pulling force of $40 \cos 65^\circ = 40 \cdot 0.4223 = 16.89$ kilograms, or so [Major’s note].

The mercenary at the top of the pole clenched his teeth and started pulling the central knotted bow. Yet the crossbar did not move a single centimeter. The weight of the wood and the criminal (totaling somewhat more than 110 kilograms) was too much for the exhausted infantryman. Arsenius and the centurion yelled, almost in unison, to compel a final hoist. It was useless. The panting Roman made a sign with his right hand indicating impotence and let it fall against the fork in the vertical pole.

I looked at Jesus and counted his rate of respiration: thirty-five very short inspirations per minute! His fingertips had started to turn a bluish color. The cyanosis or oxygen deficiency in his blood had made an appearance. Alarmed, I examined his lips, but the hypotaxia (a decrease in the normal amount of oxygen in the blood) had still not manifested in his labial mucosa membrane nor in his ears. The Teacher's weary heart increased its rate of pumping, but I doubt it was sufficient to supply the more peripheral parts of his body. If Longinus and his men did not act fast, the lack of circulation and the subsequent lack of oxygen to the Rabbi's brain could first lead to Jesus' loss of reason, then his fulminating death. Honestly, in some of those critical seconds, I came to wish for it with all of my might. It would have been a way to curtain his torturer's plans.

However, without losing his nerve, the officer commanded those who were at the base of the vertical pole to coordinate with the man who was responsible for fitting the crossbar into the slot. But how, I wondered, if there is only one ladder. The solution arrived in a moment. Two of those dexterous, agile, well-trained soldiers clutched the vertical pole with their hands while the other two climbed on their respective shoulders so that they could reach the ends of the transverse beam. At a signal from the soldier who had turned to hold the central knot in place, they began to push the sharp point of the tree into the hole in the middle of the crossbar.

"Now!" shouted the infantryman stationed at the top of the ladder.

The soldiers jumped to the rock at the same time that the centurion and the rest of the executioners released their grip on the thick rope. The horizontal beam crashed towards the ground, but at about forty centimeters along the forked stick, it caught and remained stuck in the vertical pillar's thick edge. The crowd reacted to the sudden stop with tremendous cheers and applause. The Teacher registered the impact with a very loud wail. He stopped breathing for several seconds and the holes in his wrists were visibly larger. Since the circulation was cut off, his stiff fingers barely responded to the barbarous traction.

Longinus handed the little tablet to the infantryman who proceeded to nail it above the crossbar. Meanwhile, someone else adjusted the transverse pole and another Roman pulled Jesus' leg hard, thus forcing the Nazarene's shoulder and the lower half of his body downwards. On feeling this tug, Jesus bent his head forward even further as his torso and buttocks separated from the surface of the wood. His right knee flexed involuntarily, but the executioner who was preparing to nail his foot down crushed it with a sudden blow from his mallet. The associate, who had stretched the leg, forced the sole of Jesus' foot to lie completely flat against the vertical post. Then the third nail pierced the Nazarene's foot penetrating the back through a point near the flexion's crease. (When I examined the area around the nail's entry and exit points, I estimated that the executioner had perforated the annular ligament anterior to the tarsus. This way the piece of metal slipped between the tendon of the extensor muscle of the big toe and the extensor common to the little toes and thrust between the calcaneum, cuboids, astragalus, and scaphoid to reach the back. These four bones were neatly separated and the nail had been aimed back and down, and closer to his heel than his toes.)

On this occasion, despite the executioner's skill, the nail's tip or edges either shifted or crushed some of the branches of the common palmar digital arteries or the small saphenous vein, producing a hemorrhage that frightened me. The blood spurted out in glugs that literally inundated the scant meter that existed between his right foot and the ground at Golgotha. It was possible that this destruction would affect his anterior tibial nerve, lacerate his leg and thigh thereby causing an excruciating reflexive pain in the branches of nerves, called the sacral plexus and the lumbar plexus, right in the middle of his abdomen. Yet, in spite of these horrible pains, the Galilean was still conscious! I could not explain this to myself!

It seems like a lie, but the nailing of his right foot appeared to be a relief: at least to the Nazarene's rate of respiration, in comparison to the first minutes of his crucifixion. When he could support his body weight on the nail, his points of support were divided, consequently his lungs successfully captured a larger volume of air and ventilated a somewhat greater number of alveoli. Yet at the expense of what suffering did he maintain this momentary regulation of his respiration? His deepest inspiration lasted a few tenths of a second. Almost instantaneously, the Galilean's body collapsed again as his diaphragm deflated and he entered a new agonizing phase of progressive asphyxiation. His inhalations, always through his mouth were vertiginous, brief, and clearly inadequate to completely fill and ventilate his lungs.

Now moderately calmer, the executioner positioned the fourth nail on the front of Jesus's left foot. The blow, which I mentioned previously, to the ligaments behind his knee had caused the entire area where the femur, tibia, and fibula connected to become swollen and livid. Irrespective of the leg's rigidity, the soldier bent it violently, snapping the bone mass. The nail entered without complications to protrude between five and six centimeters above the back surface, as was the case with the right foot. A smaller quantity of blood flowed out; this could have been because the metal did not touch any important veins or simply because the Nazarene's total blood volume had decreased appreciably.

His left leg remained flexed, forming a 120° angle, more or less, with respect to the vertical pole and open to the left side of the cross. Although the tree was equipped a *sidile* or iron bar that intersected the wooden pillar 1.20 meters from its base and parallel to the crossbar; it proved to be ineffective. The considerable size of the prisoner's feet meant they were beneath the support that perhaps—I suppose it was a coincidence—only served to prolong his agony.

On seeing the crucifixion of the Rabbi completed, the crowd began to gesture underscoring the Romans' macabre work with a salvo of applause. The priests expressed a special satisfaction more than anyone else did. All of their previous choler had turned into jubilation. Their vengeance was nearly quenched. Moreover, I say "nearly" since even after his death, the Son of Man's corpse was threatened by orders from this crazy brood of priests.

My attention settled on Iscariot. No sooner had he seen them cross over Jesus' second foot, than the traitor left the throng, setting out on the dusty road to Jerusalem. John Mark also vanished from sight, though I assumed he was trailing Judas' steps. The sad spectacle had entered its final act. The curious onlookers began to file away, retreating to the Holy City. Jesus of Nazareth and the Zealots—nailed so that they faced south—were now only leftovers. At 13:30 hours on Friday April 7, I communicated to Eliseo that this was the last part of the harsh nailing and both of us remained silent. It was a painful silence.

If the text appearing on Jesus of Nazareth's small tablet had been inscribed otherwise—to please the Jewish priests—perhaps there would have been less taunting of the recently crucified man. I am telling you this since, starting from the time the Teacher was hauled onto the vertical

post, the laughter and sarcasm from the audience abounded for a long time, and even later, they continued to reiterate it as a vindictive remuneration for the infamous INRI. To compensate for their failure before Pilate, the judges took particular care to intoxicate the multitude to ridicule the Teacher and subtly take away the formality of the three inscriptions, thus preventing the spectators from taking the “King of the Jews” seriously. Accordingly, some of the Sadducees turned to the increasingly large mass of people, and began to point at the Galilean on the cross.

“He has saved others, but he cannot save himself!” they exclaimed loudly.

And the people approved this display of scorn with strong scattered applause. Soon another voice stood out from the mob.

“If you are the Son of God, blessed be his name, why don’t you descend from your cross?” he asked the Nazarene.

Jesus, the members of the platoon, and I could hear these vociferations tinged with the cruelest biting irony. Since he was scarcely a meter from the ground and a little more than ten meters from the first row of Jews, it was not very difficult for him to hear the outcry and the conversation between the mercenaries on the tiny circle of stone called Golgotha.

The men took a breather now that the laborious crucifixion had concluded. The *optio* lifted the initial security cordon, which ran along the circumference of the promontory and was composed of six infantrymen, and reduced the guard for the first shift to four soldiers. Each one stood at the cardinal points surrounding the three condemned men and the remaining members of the platoon. The rest—except for two—hastened to sit down about three meters from the crosses. They watched without interest as their two colleagues proceeded to remove the ladder, carefully roll up the thick rope, and collect the various tools used for the nailing. In view of these preparations, everything pointed to a long wait. At least that is what Longinus and his men believed. In fact, the centurion informed me that the relief would not arrive until sunset.

“Can you see the initial front of the haboob to the right of your present location?”

Eliseo’s words reminded me of the imminent approach of the sirocco’s “eye”. I protected my eyes by using my left hand as a visor, and indeed, I could see some oscillating black masses raining down in the distance behind Mount Olivet. The officer also noticed these menacing clouds of dust and alerted his men, as he was a connoisseur of this type of meteorological phenomena.

The first precautionary measure was to check the stability of the crosses. At first, the vertical pillars seemed to be firmly planted in the rock’s fissures. Nevertheless, Arsenius ordered the wooden wedges to be embedded to the fullest extent. Then the soldiers tore the rest of the Zealot’s clothes into narrow strips and the officer immediately distributed them equally among the twelve infantrymen. It was not until I saw one of them covering his bare legs with the bands of cloth that I understood the reason for this operation. The Romans were wisely protecting their skin from the scourge of that sandy wind. Finally, the half dozen men who were not on surveillance duty guarding Calvary held their shields so that they arched on the ground one next to the other forming a row with the concave side facing up.

Someone reminded the platoon that the Nazarene’s clothes were still draped on the south side of the large crag. But when the soldiers retrieved the clothes and were ready to divide them, the four mercenaries who had custody of Jesus and were responsible for the nailing argued—with

ample reasons—that these pledges belonged to them and, given their good condition, they would claim them for themselves. The rest of the troops conceded. So before the sandstorm descended on Jerusalem, the officer hastily took an inventory and handed the apparel to the quartet. One received the purple cape that Antipas had given Jesus, another, the belt. The third accepted a pair of sandals and the last one saw himself rewarded with a splendid mantle.

Yet the tunic remained. What should be done with it? Someone insisted on the original idea of tearing it, but the sub officer refused. Notwithstanding its deplorable appearance—curded with dried blood, steeped in water and Lucilius’ urine, soiled by dust from the road, and frayed at the level of the knee—this garment made from hand woven fabric deserved an end more honorable than being tied to the Romans’ legs. The solution was the dice.

The soldier who was in charge of the leather sack soon returned to the group, tapping his hand, which held three dice. They formed a tight circle and took turns throwing the small (two centimeters wide) wooden cubes on the floor of the scaffold. The cubes had lost their original white color as well as their sharp edges from repeated use. The dirt had ended up giving them a characteristic luster. The values of each face—which were punched in red by means of some tool or instrument—were divided so that the sum of opposite sides always totaled seven. The toss of the dice produced: 1-5-3 for the first throw; 6-3-4 for the second player; 1-3-5 for the third, and 1-5-3 for the final player¹. The winner conscientiously folded “his” tunic; while the crowd listened to hurtful remarks against the Teacher.

“You who wanted to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself!”

“If you are the King of the Jews, as others proclaim, come down from the cross and we will believe you...”

“If he trusted in god, blessed be his name, he would be freed and he even pretended to be his son. Look at him now: crucified between two bandits!”

The author of this last sentence, who was another one of Caiaphas’ priests—did not obtain the effect he desired. I suppose the multitude did not consider Dismas and Gistas to be thieves, hence they barely joined in with this malevolent Sadducee.

¹ Although I do not understand the mysteries of the so-called Kabbalah or Qabalah, the Hebrew equivalent of “knowledge” or “tradition”, I invite anyone who can read this diary to submit the successive numbers that appeared on the dice to the conversion method used by Cagliostro who posited a correspondence between numerals and letters from the Hebrew or Latin alphabets. I performed one and I was amazed at the words that seemed to follow from the numbers “153-634-135-153”...Not only does the cosmic name of Jesus appear—always according to the esotericism—but, especially when this numerical sequence is “translated” or “converted” into letters from the Hebrew alphabet, to their surprise the Qabalah experts discovered an entire “message”. Through this system—which is the Qaballistic science called gematria—the numbers are deciphered or interpreted in the same order that they appear in the text, which produces, as I said, a whole message. I am not going to reveal this incredible “message” here and now. I prefer the readers to be the ones who work on this thrilling enigma and discover the “secret” of the numbering themselves. I only add one thing: in my desire to check and analyze the data appearing in this diary, I presented the said results of the rolls of the dice to a cold and rigorous examination by the Professor of Mathematical Sciences and Statistics, J.A. Viedma and a group of specialists in computer science headed by my good friend José Mora. All of them are residents of Palma de Mallorca. Very well, according to these experts, the calculation for the mathematical probability that one would obtain the said numbers in this order is $\frac{1}{1,679,616} = 0.00000059537$. This is to say there is a very low probability for this result [JJB’s note].

During the time that the soldiers guarded the Teacher's garments, a thought struck me: what would happen to those clothes? Where were they going to end up? I was sure of one thing: the mercenaries were not going to give them away, nor were they going to throw them away, since, according to the custom, these were their belongings. On the other hand, it would not have been easy for Jesus' disciples to keep track of these clothes. The majority of these Romans would soon return to their campground that was based in the city of Caesarea and, over the coming months, many would be relocated or discharged. All this made me suspect that, in contrast to what transpired with his burial linen, Jesus of Nazareth was not partial to his disciples keeping mementoes that were liable to be converted into relics for superstitious adoration, with the associated risk of subsequently forgetting his real message or relegating it to a secondary plane¹.

After the clothes had been distributed, Longinus also called for his deputy, to examine the prisoners' fastenings. The *optio* first approached the cross on the right and touched the head of the nail in the guerilla's left foot. It seemed to be solidly nailed. The Zealot, whose pale body was violently curved forward, had not ceased twisting and screaming for a moment as he tried to survive. However, the painful conditions were increasingly onerous for stealing mouthfuls of air, which only added new afflictions and major hemorrhages to his body.

Seeing Arsenius at the bottom of the cross, Gistas made a supreme effort and, by tensing the muscles in his shoulders, succeeded in raising his arms. He inhaled and in the instant he

¹ It is well known among church members—especially those of the Catholic Church, that the current number of relics that are allegedly related to or belonging to the Galilean's Passion exceeds one thousand. From an objective, scientific, archeological point of view, this is so preposterous as to be impossible. For example, there is a presumed "holy tunic" preserved in the basilica of Saint Denis in Argenteuil, which is north of Paris. And another one resides in the Trier Cathedral. With the utmost respect to those who believe in both of these "robes", neither of them could be the one worn by the Teacher from Galilee. Although the approximate dimensions of the first one are 1.45 meters long and 1.15 meters wide, its deficiencies include its tailoring and the fabric. Indeed, it is made with a coarse burlap framework of hemp threads, which has nothing to do with types commonly used by the Hebrews for articles of clothing during that era, namely cotton, wool, and linen. (For a tunic made from material as rough and thin as that, the legionaries would not have wasted any time drawing lots.) The second one is even more difficult to identify. It was composed of a series of very fine swatches of light brown fabric and wrapped between two pieces of cloth to protect it from moths. One of these is silk damask, which was possibly made in Asia between the sixth and the ninth centuries. A similar situation occurs with the nails and Christ's cross. According to the tradition, the pious Empress Saint Helena exhumed them in the fourth century. (To begin with, I doubt the Roman forces would have wasted the time or the money burying the vertical pillar and the crossbar as well as the nails after each execution as some exegesis claim in defense of the act by the aforementioned mother of Emperor Constantine.) Based upon these same legends, Saint Helena ordered one of the horseshoes for her son's horse to be attached with one of the nails. Today it is conserved in Carpentras. The other nail formed a circle in Constantine's helmet and it is said that this circle is now a part of the iron crown of the Kings of Lombardy, which is kept in Monza. The third nail is purported to have abated a storm in the Adriatic Sea. The case is that at present there are several churches in Europe that revere supposed nails that are presumably from the Passion—up to a total of ten! Two are in Rome; one at the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem; at Saint Mary in the Kapital in Venice; in Trier, in Florence, in Seine, in Paris, and in Arras. The situation in respect to the wood from Jesus' cross is much more complex. The Christian world is literally strewn with splinters of all sizes that have been reputed to be extracted from the true cross. As Breckenridge, Salmasi, and others say, 'If you put all of these relics together you could plant a forest...' The largest piece is perhaps the one venerated at Santo Toribio de Libana in the northern province of Santander, Spain. The tradition states that Santo Toribio who was a bishop from Astorga, Spain and a contemporary of Saint Leo I the Great, brought this wood from cross from Jerusalem. One of the facts in favor of this so-called remnant of the cross that held the Teacher is the type of wood: pine. Nonetheless, from the scientific perspective, there are continuing doubts about its origin [Major's note].

expelled his limited air, he launched a glob of saliva mixed with blood at the sub officer, thus insulting him. Outraged, the centurion's assistant grabbed a javelin and responded by hitting Gistas full on with the shaft in a blow that ran from the center of the Zealot's mouth to his stomach. The castigated diaphragm suffered even more, plunging the convict into a process of accelerated asphyxiation.

Continuing to look upwards, the distrustful *optio* repeated the test on Jesus' feet and ultimately on the nails of the third crucified man. This one had regained consciousness, yet his gaze was dull and disoriented. This could have been a consequence of the liquor. The pain had eliminated his unconsciousness and now he did not stop moaning. Suddenly, between a bellow and screech, with his face bathed in cold sweat, Gistas turned his head to his left and shouted at the Teacher.

"If you are the Son of God, why don't you secure your salvation and ours?"

Straightaway he was suffocated from the exertion and collapsed on the lower support points, panting and determined in his new rapid inhalations. But the Teacher did not answer, instead the other guerilla did. Because he rested the tip of his left foot on the middle of the horizontal bar, his respiratory system was not as fatigued as that of his companions on their crosses.

"Aren't you afraid of god?" he reproached his partner in a faltering voice. "Don't you see that our suffering... is because of our actions?" Dismas paused, fighting for a new inhalation. Finally he continued, "But...this man suffers unjustly! Wouldn't it be preferable for us to seek forgiveness for our sins...and salvation...for our souls?"

The muscles in his arms relaxed and his abdomen inflated like a globe. Jesus of Nazareth, who had heard the words of both Zealots, opened his lips a few millimeters with the evident desire to reply. But his body bowed away from the vertical pillar while his lower extremities sagged against it and would not obey him. Nevertheless, the giant did not give up. He increased the number of inhalations through his mouth to forty per minute, when the normal autonomic rate for human inspirations is sixteen—and he attempted to contract the powerful muscles in his thighs in an effort to hoist himself up a few centimeters to bring air into his lungs.

However, the past five or six minutes on the cross had burned up the limited potential in all of his muscle bundles in his thighs and legs. These were utilized with essential support of the nails in his feet in order to take in oxygen. Hence, his biceps femoris, satorius, anterior rectus abdominus, vastus, and gastrocnemius refused to function. The rigidity of all of these muscles fibers led me to the conviction that the dreadful tetanization had started earlier than expected. (The agonizing condition of tetanic contraction—always occurs in the muscles in the anaerobic process or with a lack of oxygen. Under these conditions, the lactic acid that is between the muscle fibers cannot metabolize therefore it crystalizes. Then the organism experiences a lacerating pain, which is well known by athletes.)

Once he realized his legs had begun to fail, since they were first seized by convulsions and muscular spasms that are the characteristic symptoms of incipient but irreversible muscular tetanization, the Teacher strained the articulations in his elbows while he sought a resting point in the nails in his wrists. He demanded the muscles in his forearms to serve as a "bridge" to elevate his shoulders at the same time. Between gasps, inhalations, and faltering moans provoked by friction against or the crushing of the medial nerves in his wrists by the piece of metal that perforated his carpels, at last this exemplary human conquered the force of gravity, hauled

himself up, and relaxed his diaphragm. His deltoids, which were as hard as rocks, transformed his shoulders into “hands” and the Nazarene’s mouth opened, quivering, winning half the battle to inhale the dusty air that lashed us.

Soon after observing Jesus’ titanic effort, the Zealot who had defended him, spoke again.

“Lord,” he said in a pleading voice, “Remember me... when you enter your kingdom!”

At the same instant that he expelled part of the air that robbed him of his last inhalation, the Galilean managed to respond with the arteries in his neck as taunt as furrows.

“Truly...I say to you...This day you will be with me... in paradise.”

The muscles in his shoulders, arms, and forearms lowered and with them, all of the Nazarene's body weight doubled over “in a saw” without hope of immediately repeating similar exhausting “work”¹. For my part, in view of the rapid deterioration of the giant’s body, I was ready to put in my “rattlesnake eyes” contact lenses and begin one of the most vital and delicate medical monitoring operations of this mission. But two events—one of them was absolutely unanticipated and disturbing—delayed this unprecedented exploration of the Galilean's body.

At about 13:40 hours, I hear Eliseo’s voice say “5 by 5” in my ear. With some excitement, I anticipate the fact that I, as well as the Hebrews and the platoon, which guarded Golgotha, would have a panoramic view of the Holy City and this spot transformed into an inferno. The initial front of the haboob descended over Mount Olivet’s eastern slope like a

¹ In a report compiled after this first “grand journey” and based upon Jesus’ body weight, the length of his arms, the distance between his shoulders and the nail, and the thirty degree angle formed by his upper body and the horizontal, the Trojan Horse team presented the following theoretical considerations. The distance between the nails in his wrists and an imaginary horizontal line that passes through the centers of both of his shoulder joints was approximately 26.5 centimeters. Basically, this was the total chilling height the Teacher had to lift himself each time he achieved a deep inhalation. Considering that the deltoid muscle, which extends from the clavicle and the scapula to the humerus and only weighs a kilogram at the maximum, was designed to move the shoulder and arm, the force it was subjected to in the Galilean’s case was simply extraordinary. If we made these deltoids perform an inverse motion by placing the attachments into the humerus and pulling upwards to elevate the body weight, then we could compare the enormous difficulty involved to that perfectly evident in the unique exercise in gymnastics that is performed at the end of the rings. It is popularly known as “doing the Christ.” Without assistance from the muscles in his lower extremities, the muscles in the shoulders had to raise the weight corresponding to his head, trunk, and abdomen to the core of his lower limbs. Assuming Christ’s total mass was about 82 kilograms, it follows that the aforementioned musculature must elevate two-thirds of his body weight, in other words, about 54.6 kilograms. Hence from the expression $\text{weight} = \text{mass} \times \text{gravity}$, it was found that $54.6 \times 9.8 = 535.73$ Joules. By measuring the time for the said ascent of 26.5 centimeters (which is 0.265 meters) to be 1.5 seconds, the Trojan Horse team deduced that Jesus of Nazareth experienced an acceleration of 0.2355 meters per second in each second. Obviously, the following parameters were taken into account: “e” = space or distance traveled; “ v_o ” = initial velocity, which is equal to zero in this case; “a”= acceleration; and “t” = elapsed time. Or equivalently, $e = v_o \pm \frac{1}{2} a \cdot t^2$. This means $0.265 = \frac{1}{2} a \cdot (1.5)^2$. The force the Teacher had to exert for every one of these strenuous vertical hoists can be calculated from $\text{weight} = \text{mass} \times \text{acceleration}$. In other words $535.73 = F = 54.6 \times 0.2355$. The result is $F = 522.87$ Joules. In terms of “work” performed, here is the horrifying figure: $\text{work} = \text{force} \times \text{distance}$ ($T = 522.87 \times 0.265 = 138.56$ Newtons). This yielded an output of 192.37 Watts! (Where $\text{power} = \text{work}/\text{time}$ or $138.56/1.5$) If we compare these 92.37 watts to the 2.5 watts that are normally used by the same muscles to merely raise the arm, we begin to sense the gigantic excruciating effort Jesus of Nazareth expended on the cross [Major’s note].

tenebrous fog. As a precautionary measure, the *cradle* activated its defensive “belt”. Wind gusts passing over the module attained speeds of 35 knots. As the people detected the dirty lobes of the tempest advancing from the east like a colossal wave, they began to move, fleeing headlong to the wall. Many of them disappeared through the Gate of Ephraim, others who were very knowledgeable about this type of sirocco, sought refuge at the foot of the high wall that surrounded Jerusalem at that time. The sun continued shining brilliantly, high in the middle of a clear blue sky. I think this was an extremely interesting nuance.

In contrast to what the evangelists say, and to what the sacred writers allude to, the multitude did not retreat to Calvary’s outlying areas as result of the “twilight”. That was simply not what happened. Moreover, in those moments, I did not detect any fear. I will not tire of insisting that the phenomenon was annoying and dangerous, yet it was a common occurrence at those latitudes. Therefore, the Jews were accustomed to these types of sand and dust storms. Hence, in principle, it was not logical that panic would spread. However, the terror that Matthew, Mark, and Luke cited did arrive. Even so, in the future narration I will pause to reiterate that the source of the said panic was not the sirocco...

Within minutes, only a minimal contingent of priests and spectators remained of the hundreds who had witnessed the crucifixion. Perhaps there were fifty people there. The majority of them proceeded to sit on the ground and cover their heads with their heavy multicolored mantles as if this was their usual means of protection. This small group was definitely further proof of my assertion. They knew a dry storm was coming to assail them from above, yet they accepted the matter philosophically. I assume they chose to post themselves near this grisly display of the prisoners struggling between life and death.

It was during this interval that I was tempted to take out my special contact lenses and examine the Teacher’s body. However, the impending arrival of the dense, black plumes caused me to desist. At this velocity—around 70 kilometers per hour—the particles of dirt and sand would have damaged the delicate surface of the “rattlesnake eyes” ruining that phase of the mission and even placing the physical integrity of my eyes in danger. So I decided to postpone the ultrasound and the tele-thermographic recording. According to Eliseo, the “muzzle” of the haboob and the two or three lobes following it were not very deep. Their duration was predicted to be between fifteen and twenty minutes.

It was unnecessary for the centurion to give copious instructions. Every man knew how to behave before this contingency. Once Longinus had verified the Jews’ massive departure, he allowed the sentries who were grouped at the southeastern tip of Golgotha to face the storm. They formed a wall with their four shields and planted their knees in the rock, holding their improvised defense by the clamps inside each shield. The rest of the patrol raised a row of shields in front of the surface of the scaffold, forming a second wall. Next, the entire platoon, including Arsenius and the officer, crouched down to face the storm that was drawing closer by the second.

On seeing me still standing and indecisive, Longinus motioned with his hand for me to seek refuge in the pineapple formed by his men. I did so without delay. However, instead of huddling up with the soldiers facing the sirocco, I sat with my back to the patrol, without losing sight of the crucified men.

The wind suddenly became warmer, whistling. Suddenly the haboob’s first whirlwind struck Jerusalem and the rock where we were with considerable violence. In seconds, a white unraveling mass consisting of tons of suspended sand and dust swept the place, rattling and crashing against the shields’ convex surface. In spite of the mantle that covered my head, a

myriad of fine granules of sand began to assault me, penetrating through all of the spaces between my clothes and hurting my skin—especially the skin on my legs—with pinpricks. The roar of the tornado increased with its velocity. In a short time, the soldiers and I were making desperate efforts to close our eyes and protect our mouths, ears, and nostrils from the harrowing dust cloud.

As the sirocco intensified, so did the Zealots' screams. Since they were facing the wind and nearly naked, their voices became more and more raucous. The gusts of wind began to take out their fury on the convicts' defenseless bodies by shooting millions of particles of dirt at them like arrows, thus adding a new unbearable affliction. I lifted my head between the columns of dust when I could and heard more than saw one of the guerillas begging, between howls, for it to end. As for Jesus, though I could barely distinguish his figure, I could imagine the suffocating torment he was enduring.

I doubt very much that anyone on Golgotha or in the surrounding areas, or even in Jerusalem itself, could look up during that nightmare. The successive fronts of the haboob, whose "canopy" was a little less than impossible to estimate in such conditions, did rise to a height sufficient to diffuse the solar disc—at least for any observer who was immersed in this tornado. However, I did not appraise the level of obfuscation or the feeble diurnal light as adequate to classify it as "twilight". Of course, the visibility had decreased due to the airborne sand and dust, yet it was not a dense darkness as the gospels maintain. Anyone who has experienced one of these in his or her lifetime knows that regardless of how thick the meteorological phenomenon in question is, it hardly leads to "darkness". Indeed, it was after this occurred that the sun was overshadowed by a wide radius and "obscured"...

Presently two or three lobes of the "head" moved further away. Eliseo reopened the auditory connection, announcing that the "tail" of the sirocco was very weak, and would need another five or ten minutes to cross the region. Even though the mass of suspended soil was less consistent, the winds on the Earth's surface maintained velocities of no less than 20 or 25 knots.

As soon as the centurion noticed that the principle vortex had subsided, he partially stood up and inspected the four soldiers who formed a protective barrier a few meters from our "palisade". He must not have identified too many anomalies, since he immediately crouched down again to wait for the haboob's final tail winds. Eliseo was not mistaken. At around 14:00 the tornado's strength and the dustiness had diminished. Fortunately, the sirocco's main body had been dissipating since its birth over the Arabian Desert. It had reached the lands in Palestine with a "head" whose length the module's instruments measured to be about twenty kilometers, while the front was nearly 125 kilometers long. Nevertheless, the blustery winds did not cease until well into the afternoon.

When the storm stopped, the scene presented to me was simply Dantesque. Of course, all of the legionnaires and I were covered with sand. The dust had whitened the soldiers' eyebrows, hair, and uniforms, as well as the mantles of the nearly fifty Jews who had preferred to endure the lashing wind at the foot of Golgotha. As for the crucified men, on seeing them mute with their motionless heads bent over their chests, my first thought was that they had perished from asphyxiation.

Longinus must have imagined the same thing because he hurried to the crosses as he clapped his hands against his clothes to knock off the accumulated dirt. However, the moment we stood under the prisoners, we confirmed—at least to my relief—that they were still alive. Jesus' floating ribs were undergoing sporadic oscillations, which are a sign of weak pulmonary ventilation. His wounds and the trails of blood were riddled with innumerable particles of dust

and sand that staunched his shredded kneecap and the deep breaches in his sides. The hair on his head, armpits, pubis, and chest was unrecognizable. It had been transformed into grey masses. Especially the hair on his head, which had been swamped with hemorrhages, was now, after the dust, a viscous ashen grey clump. I was stunned to see his mustache and beard caked with dust and his lips covered with a dirty crust that blurred his mucous membranes and the deep fissures.

For the Teacher as well as the Zealots, the wounds from the nails had been little more than corked by the haboob. This infernal wind, which had just attacked the thread of life that still hung high in the trees, had succeeded in performing a miracle: it stopped the Nazarene's blood loss. Frankly, at this advanced stage of the crucifixion, I do not know what could have been better. In any event, destiny is very strange...Jesus of Nazareth and the guerillas were unconscious. Basically, it was the best thing that could have occurred to them.

Then it happened. At 14:05, my partner in the module suddenly opened the connection with an excitement similar to the type he exhibited when I was staying in the garden at Gethsemane. His announcement made my mental plans stagger.

"Here it is again! Jason, I have it on the monitor! The radar is recording an echo...Direction? Affirmative: coming from the east. This is crazy!"

I turned toward that location, but once again, I did not observe anything abnormal. It was logical. Although the "wave" of dust had ceased, the Gun Dish could still detect an object on the periphery 135 miles from the point of contact where the *cradle* was parked.

"The signal is not coming in very strongly," Eliseo continued. He must have his nose glued to the radar screen.

"It is calculated to be about 400 knots...oh!"

My brother's voice was cut short. Surrounded as I was by twelve soldiers and two commanders, I could not press the connection and call him. What devilishness was happening at the module?

"Jason, they're never going to believe us! The echo made a break at almost 90°. I have it on course at 190. If it continues it will pass almost vertically above you..."

"But how can that be? What type of thing can make a turn like that?"

"Jason, you know you can't talk to me." He resumed reporting...

"Reduce, affirmative, reduce your velocity! And your altitude too! I see...an effect...Roger, it went from 400 to 275 knots...Altitude? Three hundred and falling. I'll give you 'pigeons'¹ from the module: 90,000 and steady at 190...This instant...it's accelerating! Affirmative, it is accelerating: 400...700...900 knots! It's impossible! It has stabilized at 120 (4,000 meters)...You will have it in sight immediately if it maintains this velocity. I understand it is at two o'clock from your position..."

In exactly five minutes and six seconds, Eliseo's voice erupts in my head again. Except this time I could see it: at first it was a bright spot. Then, consistent with its fast approach, the

¹ Among pilots and astronauts, "pigeons" provide the measurements of distance and bearing [Major's note].

luminosity it lost transformed it into a sort of matte colored “full moon”. It did not take the soldiers long to see it. When the centurion looked up, he was left as perplexed as I was.

“Jason, can you see it?”

“I see it is almost ‘12’ high...”

It rose to 12,000 feet.

“It stopped!”

“Affirmative, it is stationary.”

These last emotionally charged words from the module were ultimately contagious. I rubbed my eyes thinking it was a possible hallucination. All at once, I understood that this hypothetical explanation was ridiculous. Longinus, the soldiers, and I could be suffering from a type of disorder, but what about the radar?

According to Eliseo, this “object” had stabilized at 4,000 meters vertically above Jerusalem. And there it remained for two or three minutes. Judging from its height and its apparent size, which was more than ten moons, its dimensions must have been enormous. While I was watching this phenomenon with my mouth open, countless possible explanations went through my mind, of course none of them conclusively satisfied me. This was the second flying object I had seen in the last fourteen hours. How could it be? What did it mean? And, above all, who was its pilot or its crew?

At any rate, my musings were definitely pulverized when, after verifying the craft’s diameter three times, my brother announced its size: 1,757.9096 meters! It was nearly one kilometer and eight hundred meters in diameter, which is to say, its surface was slightly larger than the entire Holy City... The presence of this monstrous disc, completely silent and floating in the sky like a fragile feather filled the escort and the Hebrews with amazement and fear.

In a reflexive motion, the centurion and some of his men drew their swords and pulled back to the base of the crosses, but no one was certain how to express himself. An irrational panic twisted in their hearts and in those of the fifty or so spectators who stood next to Golgotha. All eyes were fixed on this mysterious “moon”.

According to the module’s chronometer, at 14:08 the object wavered slightly as if it shuddered and gradually ascended toward the sun in a manner I would describe as majestic. Once it reached an altitude of 180 (180,000 feet), it was stationary again. A collective shriek escaped from the Jews’ throats when they saw how this craft commenced to interpose itself between the sun and the Earth. Moreover, it achieved this by moving from east to west, always with respect to the perspective from Calvary and its environs.

In seconds, with a precision that dried my throat, the formidable object covered the fiery circle causing a progressive darkness to descend over Jerusalem and a wider radius that included me of course. This encroachment of the sun was executed millimetrically and expertly by whoever governed that immense apparatus. It was performed gradually, yet without hesitation. As I recall it today, I have the feeling that those who were responsible for this operation wanted the eclipse to be observed step by step. In less than 120 seconds the sun king disappeared and with it the daylight or more accurately, eighty percent of the light source.

As the radar confirmed the existence of the gigantic metallic mass, it instantly projected a vast cone-shaped shadow over the Holy City and the outlying areas. Even so, the solar radiation that was still present formed a luminous “corona” or “aura” that followed the curvature of the enigmatic object. In fact, the “darkness” that this produced over Jerusalem did not have the character of an absolutely dark night. For example, the brilliance that existed around the disc was sufficient for us to distinguish our surroundings with an index of brightness very similar to the quality of light that usually follows a sunset. So it remained until the fateful moment came... (I need not dwell in depth on the illogical scientific explanation that attempts to resolve the “twilight” effect with the help of a total solar eclipse. It is sufficient to note that during these dates, the moon was precisely recorded as being full and therefore a total solar eclipse was impossible. At 14:00 on April 7 in the year 30, the moon was still hidden below the eastern horizon. Besides astronomers know that an eclipse of this nature is always initiated on the west side of the solar disc. In contrast, the reverse occurred here, since the darkening of the sun started on the east side of the disc.)

Once this obstruction of the sun was achieved, Eliseo verified its parameters with the onboard instrumentation. He confirmed that this kind of flying “super fortress” was anchored at an altitude of 18,000 feet while sustaining a displacement velocity of 1,431.055 kilometers per hour. Throughout the 45 minutes that the “twilight” phenomena lasted, this object travelled a total of 1,073.2912 kilometers at a constant altitude of 6,000 meters. (The apparent solar diameter corresponds to an arc with a value of approximately 33 minutes 10 seconds.)¹

At the conclusion of the “eclipse”, which I insist could only have been a purely local projection; many of the frightened Jews fell with their faces to the ground, beat their chests with both of their hands, and cried out in terror. The bewildered Sadducees did not know how to react. Finally, the majority of the people fled to the Gate of Ephraim while the Jewish leaders—who were not very convinced—tried to retain them by shouting ‘everything was only either a spell produced by the crucified man or a celestial phenomenon...’ It was no use. The confusion among Jesus’ superstitious, uneducated enemies was such that they did not even listen to the priests’ arguments. Thus, a handful of abandoned judges stood there more concerned about what was occurring in the sky than on the scaffold. I suppose the ones at the foot of Golgotha were not there because they were very brave, but because they were obeying Caiaphas and the rest of the council.

The Roman officer had to make a supreme effort to calm his own nervousness and that of his men. If the Hebrews were afraid of this kind of manifestation, the Romans were even more so. By the force of his imperious shouting, Longinus ultimately succeeded in having his soldiers stay at the guard posts they had been assigned to by the *optio* prior to the sandstorm. Judging by the shouts, which rose above the city wall, the confusion among the pilgrims and the inhabitants of Jerusalem must have been extreme. While this area persisted in shadow, many inquisitive people came to peek out from under the arc at the Gate of Ephraim, intrigued, I presume, and anxious to know if “that” had some connection to the prodigious Teacher from Galilee. Yet none of them had the courage to approach him. Actually, one group did....

¹ I cannot resist the temptation to mention another event to the reader which seems to be closely related to this one. The sun “danced” in Fatima in 1917. As for the object that caused the “twilight” over Jerusalem and its environs, the module’s computer estimated its geosynchronous rotation above the Holy City at the parallel determined for Jerusalem to be 5,463 kilometers [Major’s note].

A few minutes after the start of the “twilight”, a score of persons appeared on the road from Jerusalem. They came to the edge of the rock with swift resolute steps. Because of the shadows, I did not recognize the apostle John until he paused a couple of meters from me. At last, he had returned. Another man and about eighteen women who were half-concealed by their robes accompanied him. I did not know any of Zebedee’s friends.

It was highly usual. In reality, ever since the entrance of that object, it was the only thing which continued fixed and imperturbable in our minds. At the exact time that the object appeared in space, the wind stopped as did the typical sounds found in a field—at least the ones I usually perceive. These included the fleeting chirps of the swallows and other birds, the buzz of the insects and those clouds of green flies as large as pennies, which had begun perching by the dozens on the blood from the crucified men, before the haboob passed over. However, I did still did not realize this until John and his entourage appeared.

Just as I was on the verge of descending into the canal in order to join John, a sudden wail from the Galilean stopped me. The Teacher seemed to have regained consciousness. The centurion and I walked a few steps and verified that the crucified man was indeed straining to sustain a constant rate of respiration. The strain on his diaphragm had swollen his abdomen and chest until they looked as rigid as the wood he hung from.

Despite the dust and dirt that covered him almost like an ominous precursor to his internment, the signs of the advancing cyanosis were increasingly evident. The rare toenail that was not bathed in blood had started to turn a typical bluish color, as did his fingertips. The tetanization was already rampant in his lower limbs. The muscles in his legs and thighs continued experiencing spasms, although they were more infrequent. Now each of his big toes had adducted, veering toward the medial plane of the Nazarene’s body.

Suddenly a hand fell on my left shoulder. It was John. With his customary courage, he had ascended to the top of Calvary. He was alone. The truth is that he was not distracted by contemplating the Teacher. His eyes were sunken; his face marked by long hours of suffering and insomnia. He looked like an old man...In a quavering voice, he begged Longinus for permission to bring Jesus of Nazareth’s mother near the cross—if only for an moment—in order to say a final farewell to her first son. As John made this petition, he waved his right arm at a small number of women who were waiting a short distance from the Sadducees.

Regardless of how much I had lived and endured on this mission, my knees shook when I heard Zebedee. Mary was here! Longinus did not have the fortitude to refuse them. He authorized the disciple to accompany the Teacher’s mother up to the scaffold on the condition that the rest of the group would remain where they were and she would stay at the foot of the cross as briefly as possible. John expressed his gratitude for the centurion’s humanitarian gesture and rushed to rejoin the group. He exchanged some words with the women and one of them promptly began to climb between the rocks with John’s and another man’s assistance. My pulse accelerated in conformance with her approach and, in a few seconds, I had the giant’s earthly mother before me...

The soldiers, who were now somewhat calmer, had descended via the second crag where they were engaged in a search for dry wood to light a fire. Since they could not logically predict the duration of the twilight, Arsenius had wisely ordered his men to collect a good supply of combustibles. It was four hours until sunset and guarding the convicts could take even longer. At the same time that Mary arrived at the foot of the central cross, two of the soldiers deposited

branches of *retama* or broom, which is very lightweight and an excellent quality for their intended purpose.

John and a second man (who was called Jude or Judas and who, as I discovered the next day, was Jesus' blood brother) let the extremely pale Hebrew woman lean on their forearms as she stopped a meter from the tree to which her son had been nailed. She was not very tall. Her head, which she raised to see the Teacher, came more or less to the level of the Nazarene's knees. Her height was possibly between 1.60 and 1.65 meters. She was around fifty years old. However, her figure was slight and somewhat stooped; the wrinkles that started around her almond shaped eyes made her seem more venerable. Despite the darkness, my attention was called to her high broad forehead finished off with an oval face on which a small straight nose barely stood out. Of course, her head was covered with a brown mantle, which did not allow me to see her hair. Nevertheless, based upon the color of her thin slightly arched eyebrows, it must have been jet black. Her tunic was a similar hue to her mantle, but it was more faded and almost reddish against Golgotha's surface.

No one spoke. John broke out crying as he clutched the lady's arm. Longinus was now touched; he retreated. However, to my amazement, Mary did not shed a single tear. Only her long calloused hands, beneath whose surface snaked a tangle of pronounced blue veins, shook in a reflection of her distress. My problems were alleviated when the officer in another gesture which said much in his favor, returned to us carrying a newly lit torch. When Longinus brought the improvised torch near the Teacher's body so his mother could better contemplate him, the Galilean, who was probably alerted by the red blaze of the fire, unglued his chin from his chest and discovered his family. His respiration was agitated again and his right eye opened to its fullest extent.

The woman as well as John and Jesus' brother did not take their eyes off the crucified man's face. The giant opened his mouth slightly wishing to speak, but his lungs, which had a diminished vital capacity level due to the multiple lesions on his respiratory muscles, and the agonizing lack of support—left him restricted by severe lack of ventilation. (A few minutes later, after I adjusted the ultrasound to his chest, the Trojan Horse project received information about his precarious situation and confirmed my suspicions. Jesus' vital capacity level was found to be much less than eighty percent of the normal estimated theoretical value of 5.50 liters.)

In spite of this, the Nazarene made a titanic effort. He contracted his abdominal muscles and almost simultaneously, the fatigued muscles in his shoulders and forearms began to throb as they searched for the energy required to raise those vital, kilometric, 26.5 centimeters. However, Christ's reserves were nearly depleted and his will was not enough. In this dramatic moment, something happened which was almost negligible and imperceptible to those who were at the foot of the cross, yet for a medical professional like me, it made my heart freeze.

Jesus arched his diaphragm for a second time and tensed his elevator and extensor muscles, making them vibrate. Simultaneously his left wrist barely turned a centimeter on the axis of his forearm. This movement of his carpus over the nail decisively coordinated with the elevation of his shoulders. The Rabbi thrust his head against the crossbar with his beard pointed to the sky as the pain provoked by the tiniest turn of his left wrist pulsed precipitously through the walls of his external jugular vein, delineating his supraclavicular fossa and the muscles in his neck in a way I had never seen in a human being.

Instantly he was half-blinded by two fine divergent trickles of blood which surged from his left wrist and ran down his elbow. The Teacher had succeeded with his intention, but at what price? Once he had raised himself up, his mouth opened to its maximum width and a mouthful of fresh air entered his lungs, his abdomen immediately caved in, revealing the iliac crest of his right hip. The crucified body collapsed again and as Jesus lowered his head, a strange smile was sketched on his face. This rictus alarmed me—not because it was really a smile, rather it was another symptom of the tetanization which hounded him. In medicine it is known as the “sardonic smile” the lips compress with their corner pointing outside and downwards.

As Mary watched her son’s desperate struggle, she dropped her face and her legs went weak, but John and Judas held her up. Her lips, which were mere shadows in the torchlight, started to quiver and the dark shadows under her eyes and above her sharp high cheekbones, were muddled in the darkness and the unfathomable bitterness in her eyes, which in spite of everything, still held a singular beauty.

“Woman...!”

The Teacher’s feeble voice made Mary and everyone else look up. The woman’s countenance was illuminated.

“Woman,” Jesus repeated, “Here is your son!”

John dried his tears with the palm of his right hand, gazing at the Teacher without a certain comprehension. Then he turned his shell of a face to the apostle.

“My son...here is your mother!” he exclaimed without strength.

The crucified man’s diminutive inhalation was nearly expended. His respiration entered a deficit and, exhausting his final opportunities, he gave an order between gasps.

“I want...you to leave...this place.”

His abdomen reverted to its deformed state; his head as well as the muscles in his shoulders and arms collapsed. The men turned on their heels and withdrew, but Mary silently advanced a step closer to the crucified man. She bent over very slowly and kissed Jesus’ right kneecap. Then she hid her face in her hands and abandoned the crag, practically carried by John and her son. I think both the centurion and I were impressed by the woman’s strength. A woman whom I had the opportunity to see again and whose conversation contained magnificent and sensational information. This small almost insignificant shadow of Mary, the Teacher’s mother was soon stamped out by the penumbra. John and Jude accompanied her on the walk back to Jerusalem. Yet the rest of the women stayed a short distance away, waiting for the anguished crucified prisoners. There with the followers and believers, was Ruth, who was also the Nazarene’s sister; Salome, John’s mother; Miriam who was Cleophas’ wife and Jesus’ maternal aunt; Rebecca and Mary from Magdala, who is mostly commonly known today as Magdalena.

At 14:25, the *optio* announced it was time to distribute dinner to the men in the patrol: salted pork, cheese, bread, and a ration of water mixed with vinegar, called *posca*. All of the soldiers with the exception of the ones on the watch gathered around the fire and gave a good account of the viands. During these short intervals of ease, I asked the officer why the patrol had piled mountains of branches at the base of each one of the crosses. Longinus invited me to try the

fermented wine, then he explained that this was a simple means of grace. In the necessary cases, in accordance with his orders or if the prisoner's agony was excessively prolonged, they would start a fire with the firewood. The smoke would finish off the crucified convict via asphyxiation in a question of minutes.

In a venture to abate the fear which doubtlessly still tormented them, some of the infantry men started to sport jokes on the prisoner's account. One of them, who was bolder than the rest, turned to Jesus and toasted him with his brass jug.

"Health and luck to the King of the Jews!"

This action caught on with the rest who also raised their *posca* to the Galilean's cross. Jesus interrupted his panting respiration.

"I'm thirsty," he declared.

The *optio* consulted the centurion who gave permission for him to approach the Galilean with the wet cylinder of tightly wound cloth that was used to plug the opening of the container of vinegary water. Arsenius took the plug and nailed it to the end of one of the escort's javelins, then he went to the foot of the wood and lifted the *pilum* so that the cloth soaked in posca touched the Teacher's dusty lips. Naturally, I did not waste the opportunity to see this. Jesus opened his mouth and anxiously bit the wad. The liquid cleaned away the dirt, yet when it penetrated the cracks in his lips, it hurt the Nazarene again, so he quickly pulled his head away. Arsenius lowered the javelin and, observing that the prisoner did not intend to moisten his mouth again, he withdrew.

The Rabbi's trembling lips were an indication his fever had increased. I took one of the torches and held it up to Jesus face. I discovered how the tetanization had begun to diminish the shine of his tooth enamel and increased its crystalline opacity. His left eye was still closed because of the hematomas. (His ineffective—due to the tetanization—parathyroid gland must already be alarmed by a marked decrease in his blood calcium concentration.)

I did not have time to lose. I walked away a few steps until I reached the southern edge of the promontory, there I turned my back to the soldiers and inserted my "rattlesnake eyes" contact lenses. Seconds before I extracted the contact lenses from my oilskin bag, I saw John and his companions rejoin the group of women on the way back to the city. I alerted Eliseo about the impending examination. I announced that, if I was not mistaken, Jesus of Nazareth was entering the full process of the throes of death and that after I synchronized the medical exploratory equipment with the actual time, I would adjust the module's chronometer by activating the ultrasonic circuit and recording the time every five minutes.

I receded again, planting myself three meters from the central cross, and activated the ultrasonic waves. It was 14:30 hours... My first concern was to investigate the general loss of blood. The constant bleeding—especially after the nailing made me suspect that there was a serious drop in his blood volume. The 3.5 Megahertz waves sought out his main arteries then the Doppler Effect in his aorta and vena cava confirmed my fears: at that instant his total blood volume was approximately 47%. Hence, at 14:30 hours Jesus had lost a total of 2.82 liters of blood. (This data and other more complex information that I preferred to spare my diary were

obtained, after the culmination of the first part of the grand journey.) Therefore the Nazarene had lost nearly half of his blood supply. If he continued bleeding copiously without the possibility of at least replacing the lost blood plasma, which, frankly was difficult, then rampant anemia would end up causing a loss of consciousness from which he would not be able to recover. At that time, assuming it would have been feasible, the Teacher's body would have been placed in a horizontal position.

“14:35 hours...”

An immediate scan of his spleen only confirmed that his erythrocyte or red blood cell generating system was practically curtailed. Its startling drop to a count of 2,700,000 per cubic millimeter of blood meant that the spleen had already been releasing its reserves, yet they would soon be exhausted. As for the acceleration of erythropoiesis in the red bone marrow and the stimulation of proteinaceous synthesis, around this time they were remaining at the bare minimum. The loss of a torrent of blood and lack of ingestion of a compensatory amount of fluids after he was hoisted on the vertical wooden pole was the source of his overwhelming thirst (this was perhaps one of his worse torments) and a disproportionate barely sustainable cardiac output. His rudimentary pulmonary ventilation, which dwindled by the second, jumped on all of the alarms. Moreover, his heart fought with supreme force to pump blood to his intercostal muscles and the muscles in his arms and shoulders. His intercostal muscles had taken responsibility for ninety percent and at times one hundred percent of the respiration.

Lastly, in a normal person the cardiac muscles work at a rate of 60 to 70 beats per minute. Yet Jesus' heart beat in his thoracic cage at an average rate of 120 to 130 beats per minute, burdening him with a dramatic demand for oxygen from his crucial organs namely his brain, kidneys, and under these circumstances, the very muscles that forced the air to enter his lungs. The survival instinct was imposing a cardiac output that the Trojan Horse team estimated to be between thirty and forty liters per minute. Nevertheless, as time was passing, the Nazarene's formidable palpitations were oscillating with a perceptible diminution that was a consequence of the lower activity of the medulla oblongata, which was beginning to falter, sending fewer nerve impulses to his heart. More concisely, this would cause an irreversible vicious circle.

“14:40 hours...”

With his ribs as tense as crossbows and his arteries pulsating without rest, the Teacher detached his chin from his chest. His right eye began to exhibit a slight strabismus or deviating curvature. He drew his eyebrows together.

“I'm thirsty!” he called out with a supplicating moan.

Longinus repeated the maneuver, but on this occasion Jesus' dry parchment like lips barely grazed the spongy stopper from the jug. The centurion swung the torch at the level of the Galilean's face, slowly waving it from right to left. But his pupil, which was very dilated, did not move. Jesus had started to lose his vision! His glassy stare prompted me to conjecture there was a papilledema or an inflammation of the optic nerve in the back of his eye. This was surely a result of intracranial hypertension or a reduced blood flow in that region of his head.

The officer carefully examined the Rabbi's face. In spite of the hematoma and a likely deviation from fractured nasal bones, his nose had begun to acquire a fine shading which was an unequivocal symptom of the pre-death phase. His orbital basins were also very pronounced; this was a side effect of the sunken buccal fat pads in his right cheek. The left one was so tumescent and bloody that it was impossible to identify any symptoms.

"This one is ready," Longinus remarked and he returned to his men, shaking his head with a certain amount of dismay.

I sat back on my heels and aimed the tiny laser at the bottom of his xiphoid process or the last segment of his sternum, striving to avoid collisions between the ultrasound and his false or floating ribs. When I encountered his lung's spongy elastic mass, his respiratory catastrophe appeared in all of its glory. His left lung had nearly collapsed due to a tear in the pleural membrane. Without a doubt, the lashes, successive beatings, and kicks to his ribs—specifically in his left lung were the instigators for the liquid that accumulated inside the pleural "sac" which envelopes the lungs.

Once I measured the most important parameters for Jesus of Nazareth's respiration¹, the computer responsible for the recording and volumetric analysis — a Dataspir online EDV 70 system— calculated that, the Galilean's vital capacity at 14:40 hours was in a critical phase with a deficit greater than seventy percent. This was just as I had supposed. The general diminution of his respiratory function corresponded to a decrease in the residual volume of air which is about 1.67 liters under normal conditions.

Jesus' diminished vital capacity, residual volume, and total lung capacity (TLC) had definitely induced a case of "small lung" syndrome. This assumes that an increase in the respiratory frequency above forty respirations per minute would only yield a poor aeration of the so-called "dead space" that is composed of the mouth, trachea, etc. hence having little effect on the time it takes to transport oxygen to the alveoli. Therefore the hyperventilation derived from the existence of the "small lung" immediately leads to an increase of carbon dioxide (CO₂) which contributed to the Rabbi's progressive poisoning or intoxication. A high dose of (CO₂) does not delay in depressing the central nervous system. The Trojan Horse project estimated that the augmented level of carbon dioxide had reached values higher than 50 to 60 millimeters of mercury thirty minutes after he had been hung on the cross. However, the increase in the arterial pressure due to the carbon dioxide (PaCO₂) had a repercussion which could be qualified as "relatively beneficial" for the Nazarene. The abundance of this toxin in Jesus' body subjected him to parathesia, which doubtlessly made his torment more "bearable".

"14:45 hours..."

The low level of oxygen in the Teacher's hemoglobin triggered his survival instinct once again. The second time he was hoisted up by the nails in his wrists, he inhaled what would be his last mouthful of air. Starting from that instant, he was prey to a very aggressive tachycardia. Since the Galilean was conscious of his limited minutes of life, he began to recite what to me seemed to be passages of the Holy Scriptures.

¹ This used the "System I" that was based on French tables compiled in Nancy, which contained about forty parameters. For example, vital capacity (VC), tidal volume (VT), residual volume (RV), total pulmonary capacity (TLC), mechanical ventilation (MV); the diffusion or transport of oxygen through the lungs; airway resistance (RAW), pulmonary and thoracic cavity compliance, and pulmonary static tension (PST) [Major's note].

The centurion and several of his men who were intrigued drew closer, but his speech was almost unintelligible. His strength was escaping in spurts and only once in a while did the words arrive in my ears that had the minimum amount of clarity. When I understood some of the Teacher's phrases that dropped down, I realized that he was not talking to us. He was simply praying!

For example, I could hear, "Lord I know you will save your supreme unction ..." or "Your hand will find all of my enemies..." and above all, the impressive and polemic, "My god, my god! Why have you forsaken me?" When I returned to the module, and actually confirmed that the Teacher had been reciting some of the passages from this holy text. I found paragraphs in Psalms 20, 21, and 22, which corresponded to the fragments I could correctly identify. The latter one, Psalms (22:2) is precisely, "My god! My god! Why have you forsaken me? Why is salvation so far from the sound of my roars?"

I could not help but smile. Theologians, exegetes, and moralists from all of the churches had, over the centuries written rivers of ink about the interpretation and order of Jesus' final words. For some, the Latin fathers in particular, the Nazarene's supposed lament was only a metaphorical expression. "Jesus," they say, "was speaking on behalf of Humanity's sinners and for himself in regard to the sins he was abandoning to god." This is the opinion of Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, and Augustine among others.

A second hypothesis that is defended by Eusebius and Epiphanius states, "Naturally Jesus was talking about his innate divinity and lamenting that he was going to his tomb and leaving humanity for some time." Finally, a third theory points to the fact that Christ felt the father had truly forsaken him. Innumerable modern theologians claim this; the most famous ones include Tertullian, Theodoret, Saint Ambrose, Saint Jerome, Saint Thomas. My opinion, is that when the Teacher was in anguish about the shadow of death, he took refuge in what is a common choice for many humans in a similar trance: prayer.

"14:50 hours..."

The acidosis fulminating ascent was another proclamation of his imminent end. On reviewing his blood circulation, we observed an alarming decrease in the pH: from 7.20 to 7.30 at the moment of the crucifixion to 7.15. His kidneys were still producing angiotensin as they struggle to elevate his arterial tension, yet this was a little less than useless. In reality, Jesus of Nazareth's ultimate respirations were increasingly fast and brief since he was already experiencing hypoxia or an inadequate supply of oxygen in his blood hemoglobin. Even so, the minutes were numbered for this last known symptom of human life.

Now cyanosis dominated all of his mucous membranes and extremities including his fingertips, toes, tongue, lips, and even areas of his skin. Suddenly his galloping heart rate swerved upwards even more to 169 beats per minute. With stiff fingers, Christ began what was to be his last muscular elevation. His left wrist turned for a second time, but on this occasion, it was more bruised and the drops of blood were more viscous. In spite of this, little streams escaped down his forearm, sliding to his elbows where they dripped down to the rock of Calvary. His neck expanded and his intercostal muscles underwent new spasms, while his face won the height millimeter by millimeter. With his mouth and one eye wide open, the Teacher seemed as though he wished to catch life, but it was already escaping from him...

His chest, which was on the verge of exploding, inhaled sufficient air for Jesus of Nazareth to make one exclamation that was so powerful that all of the mercenaries turned their heads.

“It is done. Father I put my spirit in your hands!”

Instantly his body sagged, causing all of his joints to crack. Eliseo’s voice announced it was 14:55 hours. On hearing the prisoner’s resounding sentence, the officer dashed to the foot of the vertical beam. Before I forget, I would like to point out that just as John—who was the sole witness out of the four sacred writers—precisely indicated in his gospel, Jesus did not scream in the literal sense of the word. His voice spread in a stentorian manner therefore—and maybe because of this—with the passage of the years the women and the centurion himself could have confused the Teacher’s last expression with a shout. Exactly as John reported, Jesus did not utter any such cry. That said: we can proceed.

Longinus brought the torch close to the Nazarene’s face again. His eye was open and the pupil was dilated. When the film was reviewed, one could see exactly how the cornea had turned opaque minutes prior to his final loss of consciousness. It was a pity his right eye was shut. Since it was very probable that the analysts on the Trojan Horse team would have detected the mark of Sommer-Larcher¹.

All external evidence of respiration had ceased. The Teacher remained with his chin sunk into his chest and his mouth half-open. I quickly directed the ultrasound waves over his cardiac area. The Trojan Horse team estimated that starting at 14:54 hours it took approximately three minutes for his rattling heart to attain a vertiginous rhythm with a beat slightly less than staccato. Its maximum peak was the aforementioned 169 beats per minute. The sinoatrial node, which normally fires at a rate of 72 times per minute, was well below the sixty pulses, so in a question of seconds the entire myocardium entered into ventricular fibrillation. After thirty seconds of arrhythmia, the Teacher died. However, the final cardiac arrest did not occur until two and a half minutes later.

According to these findings, Jesus of Nazareth’s death happened at approximately 14:57 hours and thirty seconds on Friday April 7 in the year 30. Despite his heart’s exertion, the blood flow to his brain was inadequate, causing among other things, his collapse and the loss of consciousness from which he did not recover.

“He’s dead...”

The centurion pronounced these words with a certain amount of pity, as if the death of his executed man had meant something to him...Actually, as I mentioned earlier, the Nazarene’s clinical death did not occur until a few seconds later, but Longinus could not have known that.

¹ This “mark” which often precedes death, is well known to physicians. It is generally present as an opaqueness in the sclera of the right eye which makes it somewhat paler than the left one. It almost always registers as in “ocular stain” which definitely appears in advance in one eye more than the other [Major’s note].

The Teacher did not delay his entrance into biological death. Suspended by nails in his wrists, his abdomen appeared to be extremely distended. His thorax stayed caved-in and his pectoralis major muscle, which had not stopped convulsing and undulating, suddenly stilled and grew rigid. A darkening violet circle around his damaged nose was noticeable between the branches and thorns in his helmet. His temples, which were partially hidden by his hair, had sunken and his right ear, which was somewhat visible—had receded. The skin immediately above his beard was wrinkled and his eyeball was so obscured it was as if it had been covered by a special type of viscose fabric. Yet the wounds made by the nails—especially the one in his right foot—continued spurting blood though it was now a lighter shade of red. (At the instant of death, his blood volume had fallen below fifty percent.) This is to say, Christ had lost more than half of his blood volume.

Just then, his sphincter relaxed, adding the fetid odor of some yellowish liquid excrement, which slid down the insides of his legs, to Jesus' gloomy aspect. I do not believe I used the tele-thermographic system at that time. Even though I was in a daze, I completed everything that the project had assigned me to do.

In a final rapid examination, I deduced that the accumulation of blood in his lower extremities had been considerable despite the rupture of the arteries in his right foot. Seconds after his death the temperature in his lower extremities was one degree centigrade above normal as a consequence of the oversupply of blood. A check of his surface tissues also confirmed that the acute and decisive process of tetanization had ruined the use of the Nazarene's legs twelve minutes after he was hoisted up and nailed to the tree. This validated my impressions about the titanic effort the Rabbi from Galilee employed each time he struggled for a mouthful of air. The failure of these hypothetical points of support in his feet resulted in a compensating strain on the muscles in his upper body (specifically his intercostal muscles and those in his arms and shoulders) that was responsible for the energy expenditure. Except these—the deltoids, the branchioradialis and the vast external muscles in his arms, the large muscles in his palms, and the aconeous and the cubital muscles in his forearms—were also blocked by tetanizations a few minutes later at eighteen minutes. At twenty minutes, his huge pectoral muscles and his powerful trapezius muscle (the network of muscles in his upper back) were decimated. This virtual “freezing” of the Galilean's formidable musculature precipitated his death as the main side effect of a horrible asphyxiation. Among the myriad of deficits in his circulation, respiration, renal, and central nervous system that converged to push him to the end, the Trojan Horse team always considered the root and underlying cause of the Teacher's demise (if the death can indeed be given the adjective ‘natural’) was asphyxiation.

At around 14:55 hours Jesus' brain entered a depasse coma with the corresponding tragic consequences...The area surrounding the perforations in his wrists and feet displayed an intense blue color which was an obvious indication of the significant inflammation process they were experiencing as well as the commensurate high temperature. By the time I aimed the laser at Jesus' eye, his dilated pupil only offered a dark spot, which is an unambiguous sign of vision loss. However, the temperature in the narrow peripheral zones around his cornea still contained heat and possibly registered as a few brief blue “rings”. Finally, the crystallization manifested as opacification and an asymmetric iris.

In reality little more could be done. General Curtiss had struggled to perfect the “nuclear magnetic resonance” technique so we would have the ability to track the atomic movements in some key areas of the Nazarene's brain, but the work was not finished in time. Sadly the man whom I was beginning to admire and love had died. Despite all of my training, once I shed the

rattlesnake contact lenses, I let myself collapse on Golgotha's hard surface. Melancholy was germinating in the most intricate part of my soul and I felt a part of me departed with him. It was a melancholy without a horizon that I knew would not leave my distraught heart until death definitively ends my poor existence. Until then I do as I did that day next to the crosses: I continue crying.

Neither Eliseo nor anyone else involved in the project ever knew about this. From the fateful moment of Jesus' death, something sank into the depths of my being. My last hours in Palestine were meaningless. I completed the program the Trojan Horse team had set out for me, almost like a robot. The worse thing was that I would never recover...

At 14 hours, 57 minutes and thirty seconds, exactly when the Nazarene's heart stopped forever, something unexpected occurred. With a synchronization that still terrifies me and which could only have one explanation, that gigantic "moon" started to move. Now with the same slowness with which that it had covered the sun, it traveled to the east, restoring that Friday's sunlight. My partner in the module promptly confirmed what I was seeing. I kept the object view as it gradually, without rushing, disappeared behind the Mount of Olives and advanced toward Levant.

This singular dawn was welcomed with lively demonstrations of joy and wonder from the legionnaires and the small group of women and Sadducees who were near the large rock. The same thing occurred in the city. Its inhabitants figured this "liberation" of the sun was a good omen. It was then, after the gigantic disk broke its stationary position and gone off into the distance, that the centurion turned to the cross where the Teacher hung. He struck the armor plate that protected his chest with his right fist and held himself in an attitude of salute.

"That certainly was a man of integrity! He really must have been the Son of God..." he declared.

The uneasy soldiers asked the *optio* and the officer for instructions, but neither Arsenius nor Longinus knew what to do. They merely doubled the guard as an added security measure. And they were not wrong in doing so...

Once the shadow disappeared, the sunlight illuminated the crucified men, revealing all of the horror of those bleeding, grotesquely contorted, sand covered bodies. The Zealots were still unconscious and—fortunately for them—remained that way until three new Roman mercenaries arrived. In spite of the thick layer of dust which stuck to the Galilean's hair, torn muscles, bloodstains, and coagulated blood, his skin was now beginning to display the marble tone characteristic of cadavers. The odor of feces made it unbearable to stay near the cross, so the infantrymen who were not on guard retreated to the edge of the scaffold. The situation was becoming a little more bearable when no sooner had the sun "come out", than the wind resumed blowing from the east. It was weaker than it had been hours before.

It is now, with hindsight, that I ask myself a question I did not even intuit then: Did the presence of that formidable object have anything to do with the strange silence that accompanied the "twilight" and the subsequent intensification of the wind? The scientist does not have an answer, but the intuitive man who also resides in me says yes. I noticed logic provoking alarm among the women, John, and Jesus' brother. The Teacher's absolute stillness was beginning to be peculiar. The state of my spirit was so low that I turned my back to them, not wishing to stumble upon Zebedee's gaze.

As I faced west, I perceived a curious commotion amid the flocks of birds that generally nest in the city's walls. Despite the wind, they had soared into flight and scattered in disarray. I shrugged. Nevertheless, almost at the same time a confused hubbub made me turn my head to the walls. What I saw there perplexed me. A pack of dogs, barking mournfully ran out of the Gate of Ephraim. I knew there were canines in Jerusalem, but I never thought there were so many. They seemed very excited, nervous, and above all frightened. It was as if someone or something had suddenly caused them to flee. But who?

Longinus and I watched them with equal incomprehension and consternation. What was happening in Jerusalem? The mutts crossed the road behind the rock on their way to the fields in the north and northeast. Some, panting and sniffing the ground incessantly, climbed up to the top of Golgotha, but the soldiers swiftly repelled them. Within seconds, a communication from the *cradle* made me shudder. It partly explained the animals' unusual behavior: the onboard sensors had begun to detect a slight increase in temperature at ground level as well as a series of gases containing a high percentage of sulfur.

Eliseo was not sure, but it was possible an earthquake was coming. This hypothesis could partially clarify the reason for the dogs' and birds' anxiety. (Animals and—to a lesser extent—humans have the ability to inhale the gases that often precede an earthquake. When the initial disturbances occur inside the Earth, gases are expelled through the narrow fissures in the soil and the animals smell them. They instantly secrete a larger volume of serotonin in their brains than normal, which triggers the mechanism of excitability in the individual. In this case, the dogs that left were getting away from the dangerous areas around the buildings in Jerusalem.)

Yet the two seismographs from Teledyne and Geotech, which had been installed by the Trojan Horse project to detect and measure the earthquakes that the evangelist Matthew had alluded to in his holy text (27:51)—and which I had honestly completely forgotten—had not recorded a signal. The experts at the National Center for Earthquakes and Meteorology in Tokyo designed both of them with the decisive collaboration of Professor Nagumene who was the director of Earthquake Forecasts and Information. These same specialists made the “landing gear” or the two supports for the cradle.

In the delicate process of miniaturization and adaptation of the equipment to our ship, one of the machines was converted into a “horizontal” seismograph, the other into a “vertical” one. The heavy pendulums were replaced by lasers capable of detecting seismic waves to a depth of 720 kilometers. Naturally it was limited to intermediate or shallow movements with a depth of at least seven kilometers below the surface of the Earth. The horizontal detector was specifically programmed for swinging or “rolling” ground. Here the traditional mirror used to make a photographic record was eliminated. Instead, the laser pulses were immediately recorded on a special paper that could amplify the vibrations more than one hundred thousand times. The “pendulum-laser” for the vertical system, which was configured for compressive motions, was in direct contact with thermal paper, so that it recorded its results on traditional magnetic tape.

It was shortly after 15:01 hours when we felt the first jolt. I remember a small detail, that in the first tenth of a second, contributed to the doubling of my confusion. On the *optio's* orders, one of the infantrymen had grasped a vessel enclosed in a mesh rope with his hands and was just about to toss some of the water in it onto the fire. Then he did. But the very instant he poured the liquid over the bonfire, the first lurch of the ground caused him to lose his balance, splashing a jet of water into the face of one of his colleagues who was sitting very close to the fire. The mercenary fell on the rock along with the pitcher which broke into pieces.

This oscillation of the rock made the soldiers who were seated stand up as fast as lightning. They were so stunned, that they did not have time to even look at one another. Although subsequent analysis determined the first seismic wave barely lasted sixteen seconds, the displacement of the strata—in a swaying manner—was powerful enough to topple over several of the soldiers. In my case, what disturbed me the most in those earliest seconds was the overwhelming dizziness I started to experience. It was as though an invisible force were shaking my brain.

Once the women detected the earthquake, they burst out screaming since they were victims of the same panic that flooded us all. The motion disappeared as suddenly as it began. Longinus and his lieutenant, whose skin was as pale as Jesus', waited a few seconds. Their eyes stared intently at the top of the crosses. Yet when the tremor ceased, the vertical beams remained immobile as they were prior to the earthquake. With a very apt appraisal, the officer addressed his men.

“Down! Everyone go down below!” he shouted.

The patrol, including the sentinels obeyed at once, rushing down the channel they had used to access Golgotha. In their abrupt flight from the scaffold, some of the soldiers forgot their helmets and shields. As the officer was on the verge of descending to the path, he paused and turned on his heels, returning to stomp out the bonfire at its base.

In that moment, my heart was splintered by fear; a distant deafening roar commenced to rise from the east. Almost simultaneously, I felt the second stronger earthquake. The entire rock trembled and shook, I am not sure if it was one of those motions or both at the same time, but I felt myself so violently displaced that I fell on Calvary's vibrating surface. (It is curious, but as I saw and felt the rock's vibrations, I remembered the sight of the spasms of the recently sacrificed cow...)

From the ground, unable to stand, I observed how the centurion had also fallen and how the crosses registered this aftershock with a rapid rattling that shook the Jews' bodies. One of the vertical posts, located behind the ones holding the crucified men and already slightly tilted, swayed like a reed shaken by the wind; then it collapsed. The panic and the suffocating dizziness were such that, regardless of the necessity, I could not and did not know how to scream or pronounce a single word. I lay face down clinging to the rock's irregularities. I was only capable of formulating one thought: Survive! The Earth's successive convulsions pummeled me without stopping and even lifted me several centimeters off the ground. Today, after this bitter experience, I recall very well how the loose stones on the crag bounced like gumballs, travelled horizontally like projectiles, and crashed violently against my body, the officer's body, and the base of the crosses.

As I was immersed in an irrational uncontrollable fright, those seconds had neither a time nor a measure. They were simply eternities. Although thunder seemed to emerge from every square centimeter of the ground, according to the module's instrumentation, the natural vigorous shaking had a relatively short duration of 47 seconds. To me those 47 seconds felt like eons. At the end of this interval, everything returned to being serene. A dead silence fell over the rock and its surroundings.

When did I manage to stand had to lean on “Moses” staff. Now it was my stomach that was turning somersaults with a distressing need to vomit, while a cold sweat gradually covered my body. Today I know a good part of this malaise was due to fear.

Longinus rose to his knees, staring at a rock on the ground as if he expected a third earthquake. Yet the tremor did not happen again. Once he realized another earthquake was not coming, the officer stood and motioned with his arm for me to follow him. Never in my life have I obeyed a person so blindly. In a few seconds the centurion and I flew more than ran down the passage from Calvary, leaving the camp open and reuniting with the platoon. Nearly all of the women had fallen to the ground where they moaned and uttered screams that made my body hair stand on end.

John and Jude, who were more terrified than the rest, did not know whether run to the fields or return to the city. Gradually in proportion to the increasing distance from the memory of the earthquake, their spirits began to recover and common sense prevailed. At least this was true for Zebedee and the Roman officers. The tragic reality of the crucifixions—which was forgotten during the tremors—immediately returned to the eyes of the Teacher’s family and friends.

But before going further, I wish to review a very mysterious fact that was discovered by the module. Based upon the data compiled in the seismograph’s permanent record, the two tremors had lasted a total of 63 seconds. The first wave, which was much weaker than the second one, corresponded to an L-wave that is sometimes called a long or surface wave. The seismograph detected a preponderance of the “Love” variety of waves, which is in more consistent with the natural uniformity of the surface strata in that geological zone. Their estimated speed was 3.3 kilometers per second. This first earthquake whose magnitude—at 4.1 on the Richter scale—was not excessively severe; the machines had not recorded the series of wiggles for the primary or P-waves, nor the posterior zigzags of the S-waves or the longer P-waves as expected¹.

To the general consternation, only the slow, undulating, superficial Love waves appeared which had nothing to do with “loving”. In contrast, P-waves, S-waves, and eventually L-waves emerged from the second earthquake. After viewing the data accumulated by the seismograph, the scientists figured that the second, stronger earthquake had a magnitude of 6.8² on the Richter scale.

¹ The energy released by an earthquake’s displacement of rocks moves in waves. These rocks behave like elastic bodies. Individual particles in the rock strata which vibrate very rapidly from one area to another are the medium for transmitting the undulations. Although the resulting patterns are extremely complicated and constantly modified by the properties of reflection, diffraction, refraction, and dispersion, they have been divided into three large internationally accepted groups. The P-wave for primary or push compression or longitudinal wave, travels in the Earth’s interior at high speed (6 to 11.3 kilometers per second) and is the first wave to arrive at the recording station. These waves are transmitted in the same manner as sound waves that is via alternating waves of compression and expansion, which move through the volume of a rock in the same direction the waves travel. They can move through solids, liquids, and gases. S-waves, the “S” stands for secondary, shock, shear force distorted, or transverse waves form a group of waves that are much slower than the P-waves, since their velocity is between 3.5 and 7.5 kilometers per second. Consequently, they are the second ones to reach the seismograph. These also travel under the surface of the Earth, however they are transmitted like light waves, namely through vibrations which are perpendicular to the path of the waves through the rocks. This wave’s velocity is proportional to the density of the material through which it traverses and it cannot travel through liquids. Finally, L-waves, which are also referred to as long or surface waves, are slow with velocities of about 3.5 kilometers per second that vary with the rock’s elasticity. They have a naturally undulating movement and primarily travel under the terrestrial surface. The two classes of L-waves are “Love” in uniform solids and Rayleigh in nonuniform solids [Major’s note].

² Purely for comparison, the famous earthquake in Lisbon in 1755, which had an estimated magnitude of nine, caused a waterquake or tsunami that devastated the Portuguese capital and its surroundings and

Up to here, everything is almost “normal” for an earthquake with this composition, except for the absence of the aforementioned push and secondary waves. The members of the Trojan Horse team reached the limit of their perplexity when, long after the second tremor and its associated wave packet had passed, the module shook and rattled for a third time. This time the seismograph was mute. According to the data from the instruments onboard, it was an explosion that made the *cradle* vibrate!

What is even more incredible is that this “expansive wave”, which travelled at a speed of 300 meters per second, originated from the same area that the seismologists calculated as the epicenter of the earthquake, specifically at 750 kilometers south-southeast of Jerusalem in the middle of the desert very close to the actual border between Jordan and Arabia, south of the present day town of Sakaka. When the results were finally confirmed, General Curtiss and the rest of us were awestruck. This type of expansive wave and part of the seismic waves were due to an underground nuclear explosion. Honestly, our surprise left us speechless. This was an undeniably rare seismic event for Palestine, where earthquakes are a less frequent occurrence than in Greece, Italy, or Spain. For comparison, in the period between 1901 and 1955, Israel and its bordering regions in Lebanon and Syria experienced a total of thirteen earthquakes¹.

According to Karnik, who made this information public in 1971, of these, ten had a magnitude between 4.5 and 5.1 always with respect to the Richter scale. Two ranged between 5.2 and 5.6 and only one bordered on 6.2 degrees of intensity to which we add this new and unexpected factor. If it was unlikely for an earthquake “coincide” with the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the problem becomes acute when, as I reported, the instrumentation captured an enigmatic underground nuclear explosion. (I do not wish to, nor should I dwell on this most fascinating incident for the simple reason that it was another one of the motives which impelled the Trojan Horse project to plan and execute a second “grand journey”.)

Ten or fifteen minutes after the earthquake, Longinus and the soldiers returned to the top of Golgotha and resumed their guard over the crucified prisoners. Minutes earlier John had approached the centurion and questioned him about the Teacher’s fate. On seeing him shake his head and lower his eyes, the apostle understood there was nothing he could do. Furthermore, there were no tears left in his heart so he simply limited himself to begging the women to depart from that place.

Amid a burst of sorrow, as the majority of the group had firmly believed that Jesus would perform a miracle and save himself, Zebedee was obeyed. They left with Judas to go to Elijah Mark’s house, which was the headquarters for the Teacher’s closest relatives ever since the definitive scattering of David Zebedee and his couriers prior to the Levites arrival from the Temple. However, I will try not anticipate events, I must adjust myself so that the strictest chronological order is maintained.

resulted in sixty thousand deaths. This was the strongest earthquake in modern history. Lake Loch Lomond in Scotland rocked because of this earthquake [Major’s note].

¹ One of the oldest records currently available about an actual earthquake in Israel comes from Josephus Flavius. In *The Wars of the Jews*, under the title ‘Cleopatra’s Ambush of Herod and Herods’ war against the Arabs and a very large earthquake that happened then’(Volume 1, Chapter XIV). The historian reports, ‘...while pursuing the enemies who followed him (Herod the Great), another misfortune occurred by the will of God during the seventh year of his reign. At that time, a war had been boiling in Actium since the beginning of spring. There was an earthquake where countless livestock and thirty thousand men perished, but his men were safe and sound since the army was in camp.’ Hence, the earthquake happened around 35 BC just 65 or 64 years prior to the one mentioned in the Gospels [Major’s note].

John remained in in the shadow of Golgotha with four or five Hebrew men who also refused to leave for Jerusalem. As I climbed to the top of the promontory again, I stared at the Sadducees. The panic had paralyzed them. I thought they would go away after the death of the “hated imposter” was accomplished. How wrong I was!

Once Judas and the women were far away along the dusty path, Longinus and Arsenius were busy checking the damage and stability of the crosses with several men when we were startled again. The Gate of Ephraim began to vomit a river of mad, vociferating people who seemed to be fleeing the city. Face with the terrible possibility of a new earthquake, thousands of residents, pilgrims, and whomever those two earthquakes had surprised in Jerusalem, chose to vacate the Holy City’s narrow streets immediately in search of open terrain. Hundreds of men, women, and children, many of them were carrying bulky bundles, riding horseback or herding flocks—started a quick uninterrupted march alongside Calvary en route to the nearby hills in Gareb.

The soldiers paused in their inspection, surveying the crag’s peripheral security. But to tell the truth, these faces that were so contorted with fear that they not even pausing for Jesus and the Zealots. Their goal was to escape and relocate as far away from the city walls as quickly as possible. Shortly before sunset, I finally had the opportunity to enter Jerusalem and inquire about the possible damage caused by the earthquake. Mark and Joseph of Arimathea both maintained that the earthquake had caused more fear than physical damage. Nearly all of the one and two story buildings constructed from light materials withstood the assault. Some small landslides occurred but luckily there were not many injuries and these were not serious.

One incident, which did provoke endless commentary and was recorded by the evangelists. This was the tearing of one of the enormous veils or curtains that hung in front of the Debir or the “holiest place” that was also called the oracle and to the Hekal or holy place that preceded it. On determining that both of these sites were inside the Sanctuary, I knew it was impossible for me to verify the rumors. However, all of the news that was transmitted by whispering Hebrews with a heavy load of superstition referred first and foremost¹ to the closed passage to the ever mysterious cubical room that measured nine meters on one side. It was considered the “dwelling place for god” and two gold-plated cherubim, which were 4.5 meters tall and delicately carved from olive wood. How much I would have given to have been able to enter that enclosure and examine the interior! But this was an impossible dream...

Once the patrol was convinced the multitude was only intent upon putting some land between them and the city, and they did not pause on their way past the judges, the officer and his soldiers resumed their visual inspection of the scaffold as they tried to take an inventory of the damage which could have originated from the earthquake. I joined them, focusing my attention on the crucified men. With the exception of the vertical beam planted behind and to the west of the prisoners, the poles had withstood the rock’s convulsions very well. The mercenaries propped them up again.

The one who was responsible for picking up the broken pieces of the water pitcher examined something and then called Longinus. In the southern direction, a few steps from the crosses there appeared to be an opening in the rock. It was not a very large cleft, being only about

¹ The following information from the Rabbinical writing the *Middot* (III: 8) gives us an idea of the size of the veil: “If the temple’s veil has been stained in must be thrown into a bath. This requires the presence of three hundred priests” [Major’s note].

25 centimeters long, but quite deep measuring two meters or more. Even so, none of the soldiers was certain the breach had not been there before the earthquake or if, on the contrary, it had just opened. Neither the centurion nor the rest of the Romans considered it to be very important. So every man returned to his own task. As for me, I could not confirm if the crack at the top of Golgotha was a consequence of the trembler either. What was certain was that the direction of the small chasm did not follow that of the promontory's natural stratification. Its direction was opposite so that it cut the surface of the rock transversely.

At 15:35 the exodus of the Hebrews out of the Holy City began to wane appreciably. Tranquility was re-established and the people who were camping in Jerusalem's outlying areas started to wander around aimlessly, relentlessly pursuing each other with questions. I believe the gradual return of the birds to the Temple and the city definitely helped to calm the people's shaken spirits. Many of them greeted the massive return of the doves and swallows to Jerusalem with delight, cheering when they flew over the threshold of the Gate of Ephraim.

The centurion, Arsenius, his men, and I all breathed a sigh of relief when a handful of blue-grey doves descended from their high flight over the Holy City to perch on the transverse wooden beams of the crosses. How sad and meaningful I found that picture! Three or four peaceful birds rested on Jesus of Nazareth's scaffold before soaring away a second later.

When the initially frightened crowds returned to Jerusalem, they were much calmer. This time, they did stop in front of the scaffold and questioned the Sadducees or stand in silence. The Sadducees took this opportunity to announce to the four winds that the Galilean had died and that "almost certainly the one responsible for the earthquakes was Jesus aided by Beelzebub". The majority of the people did not heed such chatter, but some who were attracted by the priests' vehemence—turned around to insult the Teacher thus the number of curious people who stayed on the edge of the great rock swelled.

The attention of the officer and his men was suddenly diverted by the arrival at the scaffold of three soldiers from Antonia's Fortress. After saluting Longinus, they explained the reason for their presence on the rock: they brought express orders to finish off the convicts and transfer the bodies to a mass grave in the valley at Gehenna, south of the city. The officer questioned the mercenaries about the motive, which had compelled Pontius to make a decision with such patent haste. Based on their account, soon after the earthquake a group of Sanhedrin visited the governor again, demanding what they called "the wish of the people of Jerusalem" to be known. Specifically, the bodies of the executed criminals must be taken down before sunset in accordance with the law since this Sabbath was the Day of Preparation.

Pilate's state of mind was already strongly affected by the "twilight" so he agreed, issuing the appropriate orders for Civilis to send some men. Longinus could not conceal the fact that he thought this was odd. If the messengers had been Sanhedrin instead of infantry men, he probably would not have complied. Basically, he did not care about the Jewish customs. On one hand, this change of plans bothered him deeply. Barely two and a half hours had passed since they commenced the arduous task of nailing and elevating the two Zealots and now they were urged to do the no less cumbersome and unpleasant job of unnailing them and transporting them to the common grave for criminals.

On the other hand, the countermand obviously had a certain appeal. If the operation was performed with alacrity, they would not have to spend the night out in the open air where they would be exposed to new storms, nor would they have to maintain a watch. Thus prepared to bring the mission to a conclusion, Arsenius and the officer asked for the Zealots and the Galilean

to be taken down. Longinus informed the newcomers that the prisoner in the center was already dead.

Then the three soldiers who each came equipped with batons that were identical to the ones I had seen used to beat the Roman soldier to death, took their positions. Two of them stood in front of Dismas, the third stood to the right of the second guerilla and similar to his companions, at a little less than half the height to Gistas' lower extremities. A fourth mercenary drew his sword and completed the square by posting himself in front of the older Zealot's left leg. No one had given a signal. The four soldiers placed their sandals solidly on the rock's hard crust, brandished their weapons and released four tremendous dry blows to the prisoners' unhappy legs. The cracking tibias were pulverized a third of the way up. This was followed by a series of short violent convulsions. The Zealots had been "awakened" by the pain. This brutal pounding had probably also affected their fibulas because their legs were instantly inflamed and their bodies fell a few centimeters now that they did not have the antagonistic support from the nails in their feet.

Hence, between screams the disgraced desperately opened their mouths in the full and irreversible process of suffocation. This time Gistas received the worst of it; the soldier's sword had severed his leg. In a matter of seconds, the traumatic shock and a possible stroke had accelerated his death by asphyxiation. At 15:45, both of them ceased to exist.

In spite of the centurion's injunction, one of the soldiers in charge of finishing off the convicts, stood under the Teacher's cadaver carefully scrutinizing it. The truth is neither Longinus nor the rest of his troops noticed this infantry man's intentions. Most of the Romans were busy doing everything they could in preparation for taking down the executed men. I suppose it was an issue of taking full responsibility. The Roman picked up a javelin and stabbed the Teacher in his right side, about 15 to 20 centimeters deep, without a second thought. As expected, the Nazarene's body did not react. Now persuaded of the prisoner's death, the soldier tried to withdraw the weapon. However, the *pilum's* arrow resisted because it was either lodged against or caught in the tissue.

On the second attempt, the side ceded and the bloody iron was freed. A gentle flow of ten cubic centimeters of blood followed by a quantity of serosal fluid broke out of the four and a half centimeters long wound. When I went closer to examine the gash from the javelin, I noticed it had entered between the fifth and sixth ribs, logically in an upward trajectory and had presumably run through the plane of the intercostal muscles, the visceral and parietal pleura, the lung, and the pericardium to enter the full right atrium. After death, this area of the heart contains a precise amount of liquid blood. In my opinion, it was this blood that poured out. As for the "water" John the Evangelist said he saw spurt out immediately after the discharged blood, it is very possible this referred to the aqueous character of the serosal fluid that exists between the layers of the lung's pleura.

What is known as the visceral layer closely adheres to the lung while the parietal layer covers the wall of the chest (the thoracic cavity), underneath the lung—with the exception of its center—and under the diaphragm as well. The inside is protected by the front of the mediastinum, the outside by the internal strength of the ribs. When the *pilum* tore these pleura, the aforementioned liquid, which was at a different pressure, escaped by spilling out immediately after the bloody hemorrhage. In this way, John told the truth....

Yet the affronts to Christ's body had not ended. As the semi-darkness and the wind gave way, the flies and insects descended on the crucified bodies transforming their injuries into black undulating crowns. With his extensive experience with these types of executions, the executioner who was responsible for the nailing suggested to the officer that they start the un-nailing operation with the prisoner who had been dead for the longest amount of time. Longinus assented. He also knew the cadavers would not tarry in becoming rigid, which would make his own work of conveying them to Gehenna difficult.

It was simply astonishing. At that time—nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, none of the Teacher's disciples or friends had come to claim his body. The centurion's idea was the same as the one I had glimpsed from the governor: namely remove the bodies from the crosses and transfer them to a common grave. John, who remained attentive to the soldiers' movements, had moved away from the area near the scaffold. He had a brief audience with one of David Zebedee's couriers. In only a few minutes he informed him of the Teacher's death, then once the messenger had gone off into the distance, he continued standing at the Lord's feet visibly demoralized.

As the Roman officer stood below Jesus' cross supervising preparations for dismantling it, he abruptly noticed the new, gruesome wound in the side of the body. The blood had begun forming thick clots over the fringed lower edge of the breech. He instantly understood that the cadaver had been speared and highly annoyed, he confronted his men, reprimanding them for their disobedience. Yet no one said anything.

Without wasting time, the executioner began to manipulate the head of the nail in the Teacher's right foot, while the other soldiers positioned the ladder behind the vertical beam and made another noose like the one they used to lift the prisoners. With studied precision, the mercenary imprisoned the base of the nail in both of his hands and moved it up and down. He had wisely left the head of the nail eight to ten centimeters above the skin. Consequently, there was sufficient space to maneuver it. Within a few seconds, after a strong pull, the metal tip was out of the wood and the Galilean's lower body completely relaxed, slightly oscillating in space. The infantryman held the heel in his left hand and worked on recovering the nail with his right hand. Once he dug it out of the instep, the blood spurted out again forming a huge red rose on the top of the foot.

Before he moved to stand on the left side, the executioner confirmed that his companion had climbed to the top of the ladder and tied the thick rope to the horizontal beam. He waited until the central bow was finished, then he promptly extracted the second nail. Again no problem occurred. Now the Teacher's body hung inert draining blood from his toes. His big toes were visibly separated from the rest and very bent toward the cadaver's central axis. A good part of his blood volume had accumulated in his legs and had remained relatively contained by the nails. As soon as the hemostatic effect disappeared, the flow commenced thereby transforming that section of the rock into a wide puddle that the legionnaires slipped in several times. Presently, his feet were free. Two other soldiers clung to both sides of the tree, a third and a fourth jumped on their shoulders ready to repeat the procedure used for hoisting the transverse beam.

As I was waiting got these maneuvers, I had not realized the Sanhedrin's miniscule contingent had been appreciably augmented by another group of priests who had recently come to the base of Golgotha. These Sanhedrin were on the verge of being protagonists in another pathetic incident. In unison the soldiers who were stationed at the bottom of each one of the ends of the crossbar and the ones at the top of the ladder, who held the rope, strained to raise the log until the sharp point of the vertical beam was free of the central orifice. At that precise moment, the

soldiers on the ladder shouted to warn those who controlled the rope from the ground and to have those who stood behind the cross join them. And so they did. Jesus and the wood were slowly lowered hand over hand. When his feet were a few centimeters from touching the rock, the executioner grasped the Teacher's ankles and pulled them backwards so that the cadaver landed on the ground in a completely horizontal position.

As I stepped backwards without meaning to, I stumbled over someone. As I started to apologize, I discovered the esteemed Joseph of Arimathea, who was accompanied by another Jew barely 1.50 meters tall. Joseph was glad to see me. He outlined a sad smile as he introduced me to his companion: Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin's council and the Jerusalem's so-called secular nobility.

With a courage that, in my humble opinion, has never been sufficiently valued, these two men carried an order signed by Pontius himself authorizing the transfer of the Nazarene's cadaver to a private tomb. Joseph was cognizant of the dismal fate reserved for the executed, whose bodies were generally devoured by rats and scavengers in the grave at Gehenna, so he had rushed to visit the governor and implore him for custody of his Teacher. Obviously this type of petition was not rare. Many of the families and friends of executed persons were accustomed to resorting to the highest Roman authority and obtaining their request in exchange for money or presents. Joseph had also taken a large sum to the Praetorium, but when Pilate understood his old friend's intentions, he refused the money and signed the authorization. The problem was that Joseph and Nicodemus arrived at the scaffold right after their fanatical colleagues from the Sanhedrin.

The centurion unrolled the papyrus. After reading the text attentively, he nodded giving his approval. Nonetheless, the unexpected presence of the resigned members of the Jewish council of justice at the foot for the crosses caused the Sadducees to spontaneously mobilize themselves. The priests saw perfectly how Joseph delivered the roll to the officer and suspected that the Galilean's disciples were attempting to take control of the corpse.

Meanwhile, the executioner had successfully removed the nail from Jesus' left wrist. As he was preparing to do the same to the final nail, a startling cry made him pause. Just then, the patrol and all of us saw how a myriad of the judges who were red with wrath precipitously climbed to the top of Golgotha, demanding the right to dispose of the bodies of the three executed men. Longinus gave his men a signal and fifteen of them, with Arsenius in the first row, covered the edge of the rock so that they closed off the path to the furious priests. Those who reached the end of the alley that lead to the promontory halted stunned before the gleam of the menacing swords.

Far from retreating, they faced the escort demanding the Teacher's body. Some of the onlookers, who had joined the judges, were incited and encouraged by them, so they clamored, insulted the Romans, and threw stones. These enraged rioters began to advance toward Calvary, but the centurion drew his sword, stood at the head of the soldiers, and gave the command for them to charge. In a close formation, protecting themselves from projectiles with their shields, the Romans began to walk steadily and resolutely toward the Sanhedrin who had climbed up the cliff.

Their tense faces exuded a poorly contained fury that made me tremble. These mercenaries seemed ready for anything. Sensing the danger, the priests turned and fled in disarray. One or two of them, who had tumbled down the channel in their haste, were trampled without pity by the patrol, which was running in a line toward the irate Hebrews. The charge did not delay being in full effect. When the people saw the soldiers with their swords held high ready to massacre them if necessary, they retreated, scattering in all directions. Once order was restored,

the platoon returned to the top of the rock and formed a new larger security belt around the crosses.

John and the women had been forced to run to escape the furious charge. They watched from a distance as the executioner concluded his task of un-nailing Jesus. The rest of the Sadducees and Jews who had rebelled disappeared into the fields or inside the city. Only a few were dispersed far away, where they dared to spy on the guards' movements. At that moment, no one had the courage to come within a hundred meters of the scaffold.

In spite of Calvary's enforced isolation, Longinus, who always endeavored to work with a modicum of justice, stood out on the edge of the promontory and read Pontius' order in a loud voice. I doubted very much that the rabid judges were going to come to listen to the officer. He continued by walking up to Joseph of Arimathea.

"This body belongs to you. Do what you consider appropriate. My soldiers will assist you so that no one opposes your wish," he informed him solemnly.

The venerable man, who was still pale with fright, thanked Longinus for his words and, together with Nicodemus, went to the place where the Teacher's cadaver rested. The crossbar had been removed as well as the spiny helmet, which the executioner had flung violently to the west of the small rock. Neither Joseph, his friend, nor even the soldiers paid the least attention to the thorny helmet. It simply perished in the scrubs of the rugged terrain.

As the soldiers began the second removal, the estimable Joseph knelt beside Jesus' battered head. After quietly contemplating, he extended his hand lowering the Lord's right eyelid. At the end of twenty or thirty seconds, he withdrew his fingers, but the Galilean's eye opened again. Joseph placed his hand over the eyelid and held it down for almost two minutes. During this time, a single tear slipped down the cheek of the Nazarene's friend.

Although the rigor mortis, which would be indubitably accelerated by the tetanization—did not start until six hours after death, the truth is his fallen mandible made me suspect the muscles in his mouth that had been left open had not prolonged their entry into rigidity. Moreover, the Teacher's left leg was still flexed. This was possibly due to the weight or the position he had maintained on the cross. His fingers, which were positioned like claws with the thumbs bent toward the center of the palm, had turned a deeper shade of blue.

Once Jesus' eye was closed, Nicodemus unloaded a pair of small satchels joined by a cord that he had hung over his left shoulder and set them on the ground. He had not removed them in all of this time. With Joseph's help he unfolded a length of white linen, which he had held folded under his arm, and stretched it out on a dry area of the rock. (That night in Elijah Mark's home, he told me that the man from Arimathea had acquired these six yards of cloth from a merchant in the neighborhood in the north, near Palmyra.) I examined the fabric and confirmed the cloth was linen.

I secretly measured it with "Moses'" staff; determining that it was 4.30 meters long and just over a meter wide. (In our second "adventure", the analysis performed inside the module verified some amazing and disturbing data about what happened in the tomb and definitely crowned our mission. For example, the analysis found the exact dimensions of the cloth were 4.36×1.10 meters with a weight of 234 grams per square meter. Therefore, the total weight of these 4.80 square meters was 1123 grams. When the linen fibers were magnified five thousand times, the dominant structure was "4-ply herringbone" or the "fishtail" pattern. This type of twill

fabric came from the looms in Palmyra just as Nicodemus had told me. Curiously, this sort of design did not emerge in Europe until well into the fourteenth century. Nevertheless, now I do not wish to spread our fascinating discoveries about the sheet that covered Christ's cadaver during those historic 36 hours...)

Joseph of Arimathea checked the sun's position and urged Nicodemus to help him transfer the body to the newly extended linen. The august man stood at the Teacher's head and his friend, at the foot. Both leaned forward at the same time. Joseph slid his hands under the Galilean's shoulders and held him up by his armpits. On the other end, Nicodemus grasped the giant's ankles. They exchanged a look and when they considered themselves ready, tried to lift the heavy body. And I say "tried" because I suppose only the man from Arimathea managed to lift him up a few centimeters. They attempted a second time, but the result was equally ineffective.

Forensics and those who have had at some time the need to move a corpse know from experience that it is not easy, and even less so if the points for holding on are not suitable. This was the case with Nicodemus. Absolutely helpless to lift the Nazarene, Joseph had no other remedy than to solicit the officer's assistance. Longinus understood the Hebrews' delicate situation. He aborted the un-nailing of Dismas who was left suspended from the crossbar.

One of the soldiers who was younger and stronger than Joseph, took charge of lifting the Teacher's upper body. He passed his arms underneath the armpits and slowly raised the cadaver's trunk. At the same time another soldier bent all the way over the Rabbi's knees and clasped both legs behind the knees. Then the Galilean's body formed a V-shape. With the help of two additional soldiers, who placed their hands on Jesus' back and kidneys, the Son of Man's 80 to 82 kilograms could be lifted and moved to the linen.

The body was deposited about twenty centimeters from the end of the cloth that was closest to the cross with his head positioned almost in the center of the linen. Although he was transferred barely five meters, the intense flexing of the trunk compressed his abdominal and thoracic viscera producing a new hemorrhage. Without a doubt, the pressure caused his vena cava (possibly the inferior one) to empty so that a wide trail of blood gushed out of the wound made by the javelin, dripped down his side, and slid along the entire length of his back to his waist.

Nicodemus tried to unbend the Teacher's left knee. Although he was able to lower it a few centimeters, the hematomas, torn articulations, and the leg's rigidity made it impossible to lower it completely. At last with an effort from his friend, the man from Arimathea covered the corpse with the two meters of linen which had been left free. The officer continued watching their actions, aware that the trouble posed by the willful pair of Sanhedrin did not end there. Nicodemus and Joseph were stunned when they realized they would need the cooperation of at least four men to carry Jesus. So they implored Longinus for assistance again. He smiled and entrusted his deputy to finish removing the Zealots from the crosses, then he pointed to four of the strongest men who were to accompany him and the cadaver's "owners" to the chosen tomb. Nicodemus and Joseph begged the officer to allow them participate in transporting the improvised bier. And he did.

At 16:30 hours, the centurion, another mercenary, and two of Jesus' friends lifted the linen from the scaffold's cold surface and bore away the mortal remains of the Son of Man. The remaining three soldiers followed behind them with their swords drawn, along with me. My soul was scraped as bare as that mournful rock that I will never forget. I should have expected that.

Whereas John had described a tomb located in the same place where the Teacher had been crucified, as much as I could see during my sojourn at the top of Golgotha, I could not find a single point—near the promontory—that had the main features outlined by the evangelist, that is, an orchard and a boulder that could be excavated for a tomb. Soon this new unknown would be clear.

No sooner had we descended the massive rock, than Zebedee and the women intercepted us on the path. The centurion went on guard when he saw the small group approaching, but Joseph reassured him. The apostle nearly went down on his knees imploring the infantryman to relinquish his place and allow him to hold one of the ends of the sheet. Longinus responded to the soldier's dubious glance with an affirmative nod and John took his place in carrying the body.

No one who has been crucified could be interred in a Jewish cemetery. This is what the law decreed. Joseph and Nicodemus knew this; therefore, prior to visiting Pontius, they had planned to entomb the Teacher in one of the esteemed man from Arimathea's properties. However, that final tragic Friday was receding with gigantic steps. Before long, at sunset, the trumpets at the Temple would announce the arrival of the Sabbath and the solemn observance of Passover. This is why there was a rush. Hence, the former members of the Sanhedrin who held the part of the sheet near the feet quickened their pace.

Mary Magdalene, Cleopas' wife Mary, Jesus' sister Martha, and Rebecca from Sepphoris were four or five meters behind us. At the same time, the soldiers had split up so they were on both flanks of the covered cadaver. On considering this mute absconding funeral procession, I could not quell the saddest feeling of loneliness. Abandoned by the majority of his friends and loyal followers, insulted by a mob of fanatics as he was taken down from the cross, and now, even on the road to his tomb—he could not be interred with the minimal amount of dignity and respect.

According to the law, the poorest and most miserable Jews at least had the right to a funeral with two flautists and a paid weeper. There were no tears left for the Nazarene. The hearts of the women and his three friends were dry. As for the accompaniment, the only sound was the escort's and the pallbearer's hurried footsteps trampling on the caltrops and weeds.

Nicodemus and the man from Arimathea guided the convoy along Jerusalem's northern wall and followed practically the same route as the "walk of sorrow". We crossed the road to Samaria ten or fifteen minutes after we had departed from the scaffold. Now sweaty with sore fingers from hauling the heavy body, the retinue stopped in front of an orchard. We were north of Golgotha and relatively proximate—about 100 to 150 meters—to Antonia's Fortress. (It was logical that Jerusalem's rich landowners would not have their real estate and plantations or pleasure gardens near the promontory where thieves and criminals were executed. However, this appeared to be a beautiful peaceful place.)

One of the women, I think I recall it was Magdalene, went forward and released a rope, which in the manner of a bow fastened a wooden door. The door was a meter tall and surrounded by a picket fence meticulously whitewashed with lime. This fencing was approximately the same height as the wrought iron gate at the entrance and disappeared to the right and left as it was obscured by countless fruit trees.

When the iron hinges turned, they screeched like a wounded animal. The group entered the estate quickly. We walked about fifty paces always amid the verdant foliage of the

plantation's small select trees until we reached a junction in the narrow footpath that started at the threshold of the garden gate. After a brief pause, which was sufficient to recover my lost breath, Joseph and Nicodemus indicated for the soldiers to take the path on the right. The one to the left led to a small cottage approximately one hundred meters away which, judging by the slender swaying column of smoke escaping from the chimney, must have been occupied. Two little dogs came out from among the trees, barking happily and jumping between Joseph of Arimathea's legs. Immediately the venerable man gave an authoritative shout which made them retreat.

A smooth elevation of the terrain rose up in front of me about twenty meters from the fork in the path. However, it was a limestone formation that did not protrude more than one meter above ground level. We stopped and the man from Arimathea told the officer he could place Jesus' body on the ground. The clay soil which surrounded that rock had been excavated two steps from where the Nazarene's corpse lay.

The owner, Joseph of Arimathea had ordered the construction of a rustic staircase which descended into a narrow passage barely a two meters wide. At the bottom of the five steps, there was a gallery and a facade perfectly carved out of the living rock. By my crude calculation, this rocky wall was about three meters tall. A tiny square door in the center of the wall measured ninety centimeters tall on one side. Joseph asked us to excuse him as he raced away along the path to the cottage.

Meanwhile, the soldiers used this respite to sit down and rest. I leaned over and tried to peer inside the crypt. A round stone measuring a meter in diameter and very similar to a millstone stood to the left of the opening to the sepulcher. There was a small channel about twenty centimeters deep and one thirty centimeters wide at the bottom of the façade that ran its entire width. The stone was as coarsely polished as the façade; it must have weighed over five hundred kilograms. It was positioned so that it tucked into the narrow orifice that faced the door and rolled just far along the channel to it cover the narrow door that served as a door almost mathematically. As I passed my hand over its round bulk, I imagined the enormous strength it would require to move it along the small channel. I assume it was used each time the tomb was opened and closed.

When I put my head inside the crypt, it was so dark that I could not determine its depth, the height of its walls, nor any other detail. So I sat up and waited, devoting myself to surveying the special antechamber or foyer while I waited for Joseph. The distance from the façade to the steps was less than 2.20 meters. The walls of the gallery were open to the sky and dropped from a height of three meters (the maximum height corresponded to the height of the tombs facade) to a minimum of a meter or less at the level of the lowest step of the staircase. These measurements were interrupted by the respected man's return.

A Hebrew who was about fifty years old and had a short well-tended beard and a build that instinctively reminded me of the deceased Teacher accompanied him. He wore a wide straw hat and carried a heavy capacious amphora. Joseph brought two short handled torches and some sort of bundle. It was around five o'clock in the evening. The owner of the orchard knelt in front of the sepulcher's chamber and very carefully extended his left hand until he set one of the torches inside the crypt. He proceeded to hand the second one to his servant and gardener, who stood by hieratically mute as a statue without moving from the passageway.

Joseph crouched down and crawled into the cave. Within seconds, the torch's flashing reddish light disappeared inside the tomb. Then august man stuck his head out of the opening and reclaimed the second torch. His assistant hurried to deliver it together with some other supplies.

Once Joseph thought everything was ready he left the vault, informing Nicodemus that the Teacher's body could be brought down.

The soldiers obeyed his order, placing the remains on the reddish ground and then standing there trapped in the narrow corridor. The corpse was oriented so that the head was facing the narrow entry. Then the esteemed man went back inside, followed by the centurion. As soon as they were inside, both began to pull the sheet with the assistance of the three soldiers who were in the antechamber. Finally, the body was introduced into the tomb. Nicodemus passed Joseph the pair of sacks that he still carried on his shoulder and the amphora.

Satisfied with this last part of the laborious portage, John also crouched down on his heels and disappeared into the sepulcher's clear morbid light. Finding myself ignored yet ready to attain a better position, I dared to follow Nicodemus. Since I am 180 centimeters tall, I was forced to bend my spine almost double and crawl over a floor that was so rough as to be disagreeable.

When I looked up, I found myself in a square room which measured about three meters on one side and 1.70 meters in high. (This latter amount was sufficient to assure me that as long as I stayed inside the crypt, I would have no other alternative than to bow forward so my head would not bump against the rocky ceiling which, from an evaluation of the short bevels in the vaulting and in the rest of the walls, had been hard won with a chisel.) My intrusion was well received.

As I got to my feet, four men were struggling to lift the body to a mock bench 0.65 meters high which was also stolen from the stony mass and located in the right wall with respect to the hollow entrance. I rushed to join them and help in a definite manner. Ultimately, we lifted the Nazarene up. I know this poor insignificant gesture had not been approved by the project's strict code, but it was what I considered important then...

At long last Jesus remains reposed on a stone bed 1.89 meters long by 0.93 meters wide. This trough truly seemed to have been excavated to the Galilean's exact proportions. Joseph swiftly uncovered the corpse as Nicodemus unwrapped the small cloth bundle. First, he removed two completely white feathers that could have been taken from some type of domestic bird. Under the wobbling light from the torches, Joseph bowed at each corner of the altar or stone bench on which appeared before all of us, the dirty, bloody, foul smelling body of what a few hours earlier had been the majestic Son of Man.

The crust of excrement now dried out on the skin of his legs and thighs exuded an unbearable stench. Although only two hours had elapsed since the instant of clinical death, his feet and his blue fingernails already displayed post mortem cramping, predominantly in the extensor digitorum muscles in his feet. The rigidity was advancing without remedy, just as I feared. As for his head, which had fallen to the right side, the mouth was still open, revealing a livid color and his lips had turned black and blue.

His chest was completely relaxed. It appeared to be covered by a mixture of dirt and dried blood with a myriad of coagulations that defied the law of gravity as they broke off over the thoracic cavity. I observed how the epigastrium had sunk as well as the folds of his abdomen, especially the lower middle region. But what captured my attention the most was his right hand. Its back and ulnar edge were practically hidden by a broad mass of congealed blood. The four fingers exhibited marked cyanosis and their size was slightly larger than the ones on his left hand, which was still held stiffly in the shape of a claw. In my opinion, this hyperextension of the four fingers on his left hand could only have originated from some of the horrific lesions in the

corresponding extensor muscles caused by the removal of the nail and the second perforation of his carpus. The left knee persisted in its bent position and both elbows, which were now rigid, kept the forearms flexed.

When I saw Nicodemus insert the small feathers into Jesus' nostrils, I understood his intentions. If the man, who was presumed dead, had a modicum of life in him, the friction from the feathers would irritate his mucous membranes and excite respiration. This was just what rabbi A. Levy had written on the topic of "certifying the death". I have to say that the Galilean did not have any reaction. Once this procedure was done, Joseph went to the tomb's entrance and immediately came back.

"We need to hurry," he whispered. "The Sabbath will not arrive late."

He opened the amphora and poured some of the water on a piece of ash grey sponge, which was riddled with hundreds of tiny orifices. Nicodemus stood at the Teacher's feet and raised the sole of the left foot as high as possible. The man from Arimathea took off his mantle and tucked up his tunic, then he began to rub and clean the leg and the back of the thigh. Next he repeated the washing process on the right side, concluding a series of deficient scrubblings over Jesus' buttocks, testicles, and anus.

"Leave it that way," Nicodemus punctuated, each time more nervously as the end of Friday neared.

The man from Arimathea flung the sponge on the ground and started untying the small burlap sacks while his companion searched the bottom of the bundle. One of the bags contained between 15 to 20 kilograms of a golden yellow, highly aromatic, granulated powder. As soon as he opened it a delicious fragrance spread throughout the crypt. Longinus and I glanced at each other, thankful for the sudden change in the tomb's close atmosphere. I discerned that the second item he took out was a wide-mouth bell-shaped copper jug that was perfectly sealed with by a cloth cap. Once it was located, Joseph returned to Nicodemus who reprimanded him for his slowness.

Finally, I saw the strips of cloth appear in the former member of the Sanhedrin's hirsute hands. On account of their frayed edges, these thin strips must have been torn off of some squares of old fabric by hand and with dispatch. Nicodemus selected one of these "bandages" (some were more than a meter long) and pulled it at both ends so it stretched, and balanced it above the sack that held the golden dust.

Without losing an instant, the man from Arimathea buried his left hand in the sack and picked up a handful of the dry substance. He allowed some of it to escape through the bottom of his fist until the surface of the cloth was generously coated. The venerable man's trembling pulse caused a good part of the wormwood or aloe—which is what it was—to fall back into the sack or spill on the rugged floor of the mortuary chamber. Without much pretense, I collected a pinch of the powder and kept it.

When I returned to the module and submitted it to a microscopic analysis, the Trojan Horse project knew this substance was actually one of the species of aloe called *aloe succotrina* that must have been named after the island of Socotra at the entrance to the Arabian Gulf. It generally occurs in brilliant fractured masses similar to red, green, or yellow glass. When it is pulverized, the substance before my very eyes is produced. As for the aloe that originates in

Socotra, as well as the other types of aloe, such as *Hepaticae* or Barbadian, and *Hippocastanaceae*, it is the juice that was extracted from different botanical species.

These beautiful magnificent plants are members of the *Liliaceae* family, *Asphodelaceae* that grows in the hot regions of Asia, Africa, and America. A long spike with tuberos usually bilobed red flowers at its apex, shoots up from a stem or vigorously escapes from the center of a collection of large succulent leaves armed with thorns around their edges. The leaves produce the aforementioned juice.

Joseph stood and went to the Teacher's feet. He tied them together, lifting them so his companion could pass the piece of cloth impregnated with aloe around the ankles. Nicodemus blew on the aloe. To my surprise, its characteristic odor became more penetrating and intense. He knotted the "bandage" around the ankles, returned to the sack, and repeated the process with a second strip. This time, before tying the Galilean's hands, Joseph took the precaution of placing them over the corpse's pubis in a chaste and reverential manner with the left hand over the right. This motion as well as the last, revealed the large rosette of coagulated blood on the upper area behind the wrist. The triangular shaped wound with its emaciated edges made me shudder.

Once this one was fastened in accordance with Jewish law, the Rabbi's friends leaned over the sacks again. Nicodemus emptied out the contents of the jar, while Joseph filled both of his hands with an appreciable volume of aloes. At first the substance in his left palm appeared to be a light pastel colored resinous gum that sparked like a thousand red tears in the torchlight. It was myrrh. Its strong fragrance, which was less agreeable than that of aloe, quickly blended with the granulated dust to suffocate me.

Nicodemus positioned himself in front of the middle of the cadaver's upper body as the estimable Joseph moved in the other direction towards Jesus lower extremities. The man from Arimathea stood there a few seconds with the golden dust firmly pressed between his clasped hands. When he separated them, the aloe had transformed into a soft paste almost like plastic. They simultaneously devoted themselves to pinching off masses of myrrh and aloe and then smearing this amalgamation over the corpse, filling all of its breeches and natural orifices. Nicodemus busied himself with the nostrils, ears, and the large wounds in the sides. Joseph tended to the deep lacerations in the knees, the nail holes in the hands and feet, and the mess of perforations inflicted by the tacks in the bottoms of the soldiers' sandals. (Paradoxically, these were the same soldiers who defended Jesus after his death.)

It was plain to see that these men were in a hurry. If they had acted with a little less urgency, it is very likely they would not have done the plugging last. A confirmation of this arose when Joseph remembered he had missed the rectum. But Jesus lower limbs had already been bound, so he needed help from Nicodemus, who grumbled as he lifted the Galilean's legs again, making it possible for the esteemed man to insert a plug into the anus. Of course, by the end of this maneuver, a large portion of the golden powder that was deposited on the bands, which held the feet together, slipped off and fell on the linen sheet.

By the time sunset arrived, Joseph was finished and stooped. He walked to the small entrance again. In his daze of exhaustion, he tripped over an amphora and almost fell on his face. After checking the position of the sun, he came back to the stone bench, muttering something under his breath. Then, Nicodemus, who was more composed than Joseph, untied the long maroon handkerchief that is traditionally used to wipe away sweat from around his right arm. He skillfully twisted it around Jesus' head. Once the handkerchief was tightly knotted around the

crown of the head, the mandible lifted thereby closing Christ's mouth. All was now accomplished in this accelerated, provisional interment.

Before we left the crypt, Nicodemus collected various tools and put them away, while Joseph reached into his bag, and randomly pulled out pair of bronze coins, each measuring about sixteen millimeters in diameter. Following an ancient custom, the man from Arimathea placed them on the Nazarene's eyelids, even though the swollen hematomas on his left eye made the *leptons*¹ slide off. Moreover, the Teacher's head was already propped up at the level of his ears by two dagger shaped pieces of myrrh. Plus the tremendous deformation of his malar region almost buried his eye, making it difficult to place the coin on his nearly unrecognizable eyelid. Nevertheless, Joseph insisted, achieving a precarious balance for the coin on top of the hematomas.

The flickering torches put a sparkle of life in the *leptones* brilliant surface. I leaned over slightly and confirmed the minting of both of these coins was very rudimentary with an off-center effigy and numerous imperfections. Judging by their identical inscriptions and, the *lituus* or curved augural staff² and above all, the same lack of orthography in the letters that circled the effigy and the *lituus* or magical staff³, the two coins were definitely from the same issue. The legend in question read "Tibepioy Caicapoc". That is, Tiberiou Kaisaris or "of Caesar Tiberius".

Out of curiosity, I lifted the coin on his left eyelid and discovered the unworn silhouette of a *simpulum* or wine taster used in the pagan ritual libations on the reverse. In the center, next to the ladle or dipper, I read the number sixteen which was formed by an iota—which is equivalent to a ten—and the so called *episemon*, corresponding to a six. This was the date, being the year 16 in the reign of Tiberius Caesar or the year 29 in the Christian era.

In advance of covering him with the second half of the linen, Jesus' good friend knelt before the body, bowed his head, and observed a few minutes of silence. Zebedee did the same. These were especially emotional and intense moments. With a feeling of desolation, I understood this would be the last time I would see the Teacher's lifeless body. I must not hide the fact that in the act of staring at his crushed remains, I was struck by a heavy crushing doubt as dense and oppressive as the burial chamber: Would he resurrect himself as he had announced? But how?

¹ This coin, which was similar to Agrippa I's *perutah*, was minted in Jerusalem. They have discovered copies of these coins issued under Coponius, Valerius Gratus, Pontius Pilate and Antonius Felix. Its value was minimal, since a silver *denari* was equivalent to approximately 192 *perutah* [Major's note].

² On consulting the principal catalogs of antique world coins at the British Museum and Madden's book on Jewish currency, which was published in 1867 and reprinted in 1967—the experts on the Trojan Horse team confirmed the majority of the money minted by Pontius Pilate (from the years 26 to 36 AD) was identifiable by the symbols such as the *lituus*, *simpulum*, etc. Due to their pagan character, these images offended the Hebrew population's religious feelings. The case is that the *lituus* or the curved staff of an augur or fortuneteller was supposedly a symbol of Pontius's audacity. Since he was the only Roman governor who dared to injure the Judaic religious fiber in this manner, which included a high degree of adulation for Tiberius, who was also a great fan of astrology as we have already seen [Major's note].

³ One of the orthographic errors that called my attention the most was the initial 'c' in the word "Caicapoc". Logically the one who was responsible for the die had minted the title with the Greek "K" for "Kaicapoc" or "Kaisaris" (meaning Caesar). Otherwise, the Roman's infamous reputation for lousy minting did not surprise me a great deal. Another mistake, which was a consequence of "convenience", appeared in the two final "c's" in "Caicapoc". Actually, this Greek word should have been written with two Σ's which is the letter sigma. The artisans probably preferred to save themselves from using the cumbersome letter so they truncated it in the middle to "c" or "c" [Major's note].

This devastating catastrophe had reduced his organism to a wreck...I admit this with complete sincerity. My scientific mind rebelled. No one, as far as I knew had succeeded in doing this in the entire history of humanity. Why was this Galilean going to achieve what the rest of humanity had not? If he really enjoyed such extraordinary powers, why had he not avoided so much torture and above all, such a cruel and humiliating death?

Nicodemus and nearly all of Jesus' friends and disciples were not quite sure about the Teacher's predicted resurrection. Even Joseph doubted it. A tangible sign of what I mentioned can be noted precisely in the fast, cursory cleaning of the cadaver. The intentions of esteemed man from Arimathea and his companion, as well as the women who waited outside the crypt, had nothing to do with the Rabbi's supposed resurrection. If they had truly believed in his prodigious success, why did they not postpone embalming Jesus' body until after Saturday's feast? It seems logical that they would not have filled in his wounds nor covered him with those aromatic products whose main purpose is to counteract the impending stench of putrefaction.

Hunched over, stunned, and extremely tired from so many emotions and a lack of sleep, I was unable to formulate a thought or a fleeting prayer before the Son of Man. To my utter despair, I realized I did not remember any of the few prayers I had learnt during my childhood. However, I symbolically joined Joseph of Arimathea when he stood up, bowed over his friend's wrinkled brow and deposited a warm, lingering kiss there.

Afterwards, he covered Jesus with the sheet and collected the torches. I rushed to fetch my mantle and at that instant as I was crouching down, I noticed a pair of wicker baskets full of debris and a small pick ax in one of the corners, half-hidden in the darkness. Joseph perceived my observation and apologized for the disorder in the place. According to him, the tomb was still under construction.

At around 17:45 hours, John, Longinus, Joseph and I were leaving through the passage. The rest was relatively easy. While the man from Arimathea held up the torches, the centurion, his four soldiers, and the gardener pushed the circular rock, rolling it through the deep groove until it completely covered the small opening in the façade. I emphasize that it was "relatively easy" because if it had not been for the presence of six men, I do not know how Nicodemus and the ingenious Joseph would have moved half a metric ton....The sinister, spine chilling screeching of the stone as it made its final brush with the mausoleum's main wall, put an end to many of the hopes of these men and women.

At such a moment, how could one suppose that the closure of the tomb was nothing more than a short parenthesis in this amazing and baffling story? Prior to his departure for Jerusalem, Joseph thanked the Romans for their decisive invaluable assistance by giving each one of them a generous amount of money. I think I am not mistaken in saying from that Friday a firm and sincere friendship grew between Longinus and the man from Arimathea.

As we left the garden, the women who had stayed far away from the tomb, as specified in Judaic law, joined Joseph's weary steps, expressing their doubts about the level of cleanliness achieved in the Teacher's speedy interment. As much as Nicodemus and the older man agreed with the women's assessments, he authorized them to return at daybreak on Sunday and proceed with a more correct embalming. Nicodemus also gave the rest of the aloe and myrrh to them with the rejoinder that they must not forget to trim Jesus' hair and beard, wash him meticulously, and place a feather or a key on his body as symbols of his celibacy, just as they had done from time

immemorial. The officer and his men took their leave in front of the Fish gate, setting out for Golgotha again with the express mission to transfer the Zealot's bodies to the grave at Gehenna.

At six o'clock in the evening, when we were a few steps from Elijah Mark's house, three clarions rose from the Temple's cupola, announcing the end of the day to the city. From that moment, in the full observance of Passover, activity in Jerusalem began to decrease. The people who had recovered from the fright provoked by the earthquakes, now happily hurried to their homes, ready to celebrate the feast and complete their Passover dinner. I do not know why, but the excitement and the Hebrew's constant salutations as they wished each other peace as they crossed the narrow alleys brought me the memory of the festive atmosphere, especially at dusk, on Christmas Eve, when I lived in my country.

Oddly enough, with the exception of Nicodemus, John, Joseph, and the group of women who walked along dejectedly, the rest of the pilgrims and residents of the Holy City, were not afflicted—not even a little bit—by what had just occurred on the big rock at Calvary. I am convinced that the immense majority still did not know about the tragic death of the prophet from Galilee. And if they did know, evidently they had forgotten or they did not care...This was the sad, but authentic and real panorama in Jerusalem on April 7 in the year 30. A day which, for a long time, would be remembered not for the crucifixion of Jesus, but for the “bad omen” that eclipsed the sun and the subsequent earthquake.

Nicodemus and Joseph said farewell at the gate to Mark's home. The former was about to join the apostles who had taken refuge in his house and observe the obligatory Passover. In his turn, Zebedee, disheartened and submerged in an infinite sadness, withdrew to his residence where Mary, the Nazarene's mother was staying. Joseph kept the women company until they were inside Mark's mansion, where they met their companions that Jude had led there from the scaffold.

The family, which was disconsolate from the events, welcomed the respected man and the women with great solicitude, entreating them to make them current with everything that had transpired since the Teacher's death. David Zebedee's efficient messenger service had continued to punctually inform the main nucleus of the Rabbi's friends and followers. By means of these couriers, Elijah Mark and the rest of the apostles who were distributed throughout Jerusalem, Bethany, and Bethpage knew about the Galilean's death within one or two hours after his demise.

When the venerable man finished his account, Elijah's spouse returned to fill our glasses with warm comforting wine. Before Joseph decided to leave the Marks' home, I asked him to tell me what happened after he saw me depart from the Temple, including the incident with the judges and the Jews who tried to change the text of the Nazarene's “INRI”. Joseph regarded me with a profound weariness.

“Why would I recall that sad story?” he remarked without enthusiasm.

Nonetheless, I needed to ascertain what happened inside the Sanctuary. What had taken place at the Sanhedrin's meeting? Where had Judas Iscariot been? Elijah Mark's son had not seen him in the house or, at least, I had not come across him and that worried me. I begged with such anxiety that the good Joseph ultimately yielded.

“I went from the walls at Antonia's Tower to the Temple,” the esteemed man commenced.

“As we mentioned before, it was just as I suspected in my heart: the blind Sadducees who were loyal to Caiaphas’ clan and his father-in-law, had also conspired against one of the Teacher’s most intimate friends. His fear of an uprising on the part of Jesus’ friends and followers had not dissipated when Pontius Pilate approved the condemned man’s death sentence. It was all on the contrary. According to him, that was the exact moment the situation had become much more delicate. The same way they had intended to capture Lazarus, namely by adopting opportune measures to seize and incarcerate the disciples—”

“Measures? What measures?” I interrupted.

“No sooner had I returned to general headquarters at the sanctuary, than the Levites, at the high priest’s instructions, were forming an escort and setting out for Simon the Leaper’s property at Gethsemane. Thanks to the infinite goodness of god, blessed be his name! Shortly before their departure, I established contact with one of David Zebedee’s emissaries. Once I informed him about what the Sanhedrin planned to do, he ran to Mount Olivet and gave the alarm.

“But I could not add anything great to the luck of those who were at the campsite. I only know that when the captain of the Temple guards came back, he was furious. ‘The imposter’s followers fled like cowards’, he explained to Caiaphas, ‘but we burned down their camp.’ The high priest and the majority of the members of the Sanhedrin relaxed when they thought they had disbanded the Nazarene’s people and considerably reduced the risk of an insurrection. Caiaphas gathered the council in the Hall of Hewn Stones and proceeded to acquaint them with everything that occurred from that night and subsequent dawn to the moment our Teacher finally entered the Praetorium. The pile of lies and injuries arbitrarily wielded by Annas’ father-in-law was so extreme that I left the tribunal in disgust.

“Judas appeared when I was about to leave the Temple. We looked at each other in silence, then the traitor entered the Sanhedrin’s room. I went inside the council’s headquarters again, prepared to ruin the scoundrel, but it was unnecessary. When Caiaphas and his men recognized Judas Iscariot they began to murmur among themselves, yet no one said a word to him.

“It seems Judas expected a triumphant reception. He mistakenly thought he would be regaled to the brim with honors and glory for his ‘great service to the nation’. Poor wretch! At a sign from the high priest, one of the servants went to Judas and, touching him on the back, invited Judas to follow him. Visibly confused and deceived, the traitor obeyed and they both exited the room. Then the servant handed him a bag, saying, ‘Judas, I am in charge of paying you for betraying Jesus the Galilean. Here is your recompense.’ Iscariot paled, opened the bag, and with a cold-bloodedness that still terrifies me, counted the money....”

Joseph paused. Once he was sure he had clarified the importance of the compensation, he avoided the subject. I saw it was imperative to interrupt him again in order to express my interest in the exact amount.

“Thirty coins,” the venerable man answered with repugnance.

“Silver *denari*?” I pressed.

“No, thirty *shekels*.”

(The silvery coin, which was popularly known as the “*shekel* of Tyre”, was the money commonly used for paying the tributes to the Temple. It was definitely the money the priests used in the majority of their business transactions. At that time, one *shekel* was equivalent to about four silver *denari*. Thus it was a moderate sum. This is the reason why, based upon the testimony of the evangelist in Matthew (27:9) the priests purchased a field with the money Judas rejected. Today 120 silver denari would be comparable to approximately two hundred dollars.)¹

The man from Arimathea proceeded, “When the traitor verified the amount in the bag, he was livid and mute with astonishment. He darted toward the council’s door, ready to protest, I assume. But the porter blocked his way, prohibiting him to enter. Defeated, Judas passed from anger to his habitual coldness. Once he put the bag inside his pocket, he left the Hall of Hewn stones. I have not seen him since....”

It was useless to insist. In effect, Joseph of Arimathea had lost track of the traitor. As he was ignorant of his fate, I assume he could not have known about the incident at the Temple and Iscariot’s desperate gesture of throwing the money at the Temple’s treasury. At least I knew about Judas’ final action from a previous reading of Matthew. Even so, had the events occurred just as the sacred author described? Fortune would reveal this unknown shortly after the esteemed man’s departure from Elijah Mark’s house.

There were two matters which obliged me to stay and, unintentionally these were magnificent excuses for me to investigate another fact. The Trojan Horse project had allotted me the ineludible mission of recovering the microphone I had hidden in a lantern in the room where Jesus’ last supper was had taken place. One of the fundamental rules of the project specified that the “astronauts” could not leave any remains, signs, or evidence of their presence in the exploration area. It was also fair to not transfer anything to “our real time” that belonged to a said epoch.

Consequently, collecting of this item was mandatory. On the other hand, it was essential for me to talk to the young John Mark. However, the adolescent had not yet appeared. So I invoked a sentimental desire to see the cenacle for one last time as a pretext to convince Elijah Mark’s spouse to accompany me to the upper story. When I entered the room, my heart almost stopped. The lantern had disappeared!

On noting my paleness, the woman confused my anguish with a supposed honorable emotion caused by walking into the pace where the Teacher had dined. I tried not to lose my nerve as I scanned the room in search of that damned lantern. Obviously, someone had taken it from the room. On the verge of a collapse, I questioned the woman of the house on the whereabouts of the beautiful piece of furniture. Now somewhat disturbed, the woman, who did not understand the significance of the affair, explained that it had shattered during the earthquake. One of the servants had taken it to a shop in Jerusalem.

I thanked her for kindly allowing me to see the cenacle and—feeling like a treeless forest—I returned to the first level. I knew from the moment the trumpets played and from the fact that it was a holiday as solemn as Passover, that the activities of artisans and work of any other type would automatically cease and not resume until the end of Passover. How could I retrieve the microphone and return to the module according to schedule on Sunday March 7? As I have insinuated, this mishap added to the series of reasons that persuaded the Trojan Horse project to repeat the “jump” to the year 30.

¹ Of course this is two hundred dollars in 1973 [JJB’s note].

I was so absorbed by this unexpected development that I barely noticed the passage of time. The Mark family was so busy preparing the Passover Seder that they hardly noticed me. Around eight o'clock at night when sleep began to overcome me, something pulled me away from my disordered thoughts. When I looked up, I encountered two familiar faces. One smiling face belonged to John Zebedee, it was in marked contrast to the aggrieved, emaciate face of the young son of my hospitable hosts. My head cleared instantly.

With a boundless joy that I did not understand, David placed the white linen mantle I had purchased from a dyer in Malkiyas on Thursday, into my hands. I had honestly forgotten about it.

"Suppose you tell me everything that happened," I finally said to the leader of the emissaries.

I silently assented. When David noticed my gloominess, he shook me affectionately.

"He will be resurrected! He promised..." David exclaimed with a conviction that left me amazed.

I scrutinized the Hebrew's tired eyes and marveled. David Zebedee truly believed what had been said. It was incredible. Here before me was a unique case of a blind, firm belief in the Teacher's promise. Neither in the audacious John the Evangelist, nor in Joseph of Arimathea, nor in any of Jesus' other friends and disciples had I observed a faith like that of this man. Paradoxically this is scarcely mentioned in the gospels. Now this was clearly the reason for his happiness.

Prior to setting out for Nicodemus' house, where he had transferred the headquarters for the couriers, David informed me of his final vicissitudes at the campsite in Gethsemane. As soon as he received the warning from Joseph, he quickly dismantled the tents in the camp and moved his "workplace" to a site at a much higher elevation on Mount Olivet. Once they had circumvented the threats from the Levites, he continued sending messengers from there to all of the places where he knew the Nazarene's apostles, friends, and family were located. The instant one of his agents knew about the order for the crucifixion, other faster messengers carried the news to Pella, Bethsaida, Philadelphia, Sidon, Damascus, and Alexandria with the news of the imminent death of Jesus by the order of the Roman governor.

For a good part of that day, David did not stop ordering couriers to Jerusalem and Bethany to promptly inform Jesus' family and his disciples about what was happening. If it had not been for the skill and bravery of this Jew, most of the apostles who were in hiding and fearful would have experienced a considerable delay before knowing about the Teacher's death. At last Zebedee released the couriers at sunset. Thereby permitting his messengers to rest and observe the required Passover Seder. Nevertheless, his conviction about the Rabbi's resurrection was so solid that before he left, he secretly communicated the need to meet at Nicodemus' house in the first hours of the morning on Sunday. He intended to transmit the good news as soon as it manifested.

Before the Marks' son rejoined his family for their Passover banquet, my curiosity was ultimately satisfied by the revelation of Iscariot's fate. It cost me a lot of work to persuade the young John Mark to speak. During the past ten hours, his child's soul had been consumed by pain, anger, and helplessness. He would never forget the bloody body of his idol and friend: Jesus

of Nazareth. How could he erase the image of the fanatical priests and the mob, who had only a little earlier, applauded the Teacher's brave and brilliant intervention on the atrium of the Gentile's Esplanade, yet were now condemning the very same Galilean at the façade of the Roman Praetorium.

I tried to soothe him by reminding him of the words David Zebedee had just said about the resurrection, but John Mark gazed at me without understanding. The expression 'and I will be resurrected on the third day' exceeded his childish mental capacity. John Mark as well as his family knew that I had remained at the foot of the cross and they recognized this as a loving and valiant gesture toward the Rabbi. The boy ended up narrating what he had seen and heard from the time I entrusted him with the task of following Judas. This is his faltering condensed account.

"When the traitor saw the soldiers finish crossing Jesus' feet, he left the scaffold with his head covered with a mantle. You saw him..."

I encouraged him to continue.

"Then Judas went directly to the Temple. I couldn't see his face, since I was always behind him, but from his huge strides and the way he pushed his way through the Sanctuary's esplanade, I knew he was wroth. He walked up to the door of the Council of Justice, but when he tried to open them, the porter stopped him. With a curse that I dare not repeat, Judas struck the man the face so he fell down, then he left him for dead."

(Of course, this reaction fit the violence that explodes from those who are extremely timid, and Iscariot was one of these.)

"He opened the large door to the Hall of Hewn Stones and found that he was interrupting the tribunal. I didn't dare move past the door jamb. If someone had placed his hand on the door, he surely would have smacked me..."

I responded to this with a smile of gratitude and John Mark recommenced.

"I could only see Caiaphas and some of the Sadducees, scribes, and Pharisees seated on wooden benches. When Judas Iscariot walked to one of these benches, the judges went silent. All of them had surprised expressions on their faces. It seemed as if they did not expect the traitor. Judas was panting. He addressed them in a tone of voice which almost made me pity him.

" 'I have sinned in the sense that I have betrayed innocent blood...You offer me money for this service, the price of a slave and by this you have insulted me.' The astonished Sadducees appeared to find what they were seeing quite unbelievable. 'I regret my deed. Here is your money.' Judas finished by removing the bag from his sash and showing it to the council. 'I want you to free me from this crime!' he exclaimed in an imperious voice. The laughter was not slow in filling the room. Those hypocrites slapped their seats while they cruelly sneered and ridiculed him. One of the men who occupied a seat near Judas motioned with his hand for Judas to leave. Before Judas did, a loud voice called out, 'Your Teacher has been condemned by the Romans. What concern is your guilt to us? Worry about it yourself!'

"Iscariot turned around and left the tribunal with his head lowered as the jeers and insults intensified again. When he passed by me, the sight of his face scared me. He held the bag in his left hand and his eyes stared at the floor. I think he didn't even see me. He walked with big steps and disappeared on the way to the Women's atrium where he entered the room with the

collection boxes. Extremely calmly, he took a fistful of the coins and threw them at a playing field (?), then he put his hand in the bag and smashed the rest of the shekels against the tiled floor. After he checked that there wasn't any money left in the bag, he flung it on the pavement and stomped on it in a rage. Next he forcefully opened a path between the shocked men who encountered him there, and left in the direction of the Gentile's Courtyard."

I believe Judas Iscariot's apparently unusual act of getting rid of thirty silver coins deserves some commentary. The words the traitor had spoken before the tribunal specifically, 'here is your money' and 'I want to free myself from this crime' were not merely a human reaction of repentance. Judas as well as the other Jews knew about the law that protected vendors from something or someone.

The Fifth Order of the *Mishnah* reads, "The 'evaluation of votes' (Arakin) is established in a total of nine chapters about the measures concerning the so called evaluation of votes. This is to say, those for whom a person had promised to deliver a pre-determined value as calculated in Leviticus (27:1-8) to the Temple in relation to their age and gender. It also covered a miniscule rule on the purchase and dedication of inherited land and houses as well as their recovery and the votes of the "exterminated".

Well now, from Iscariot's point of understanding—he considered or tried to consider it before the Sanhedrin—the delivery of his Teacher fully matched what we could call a "sale or commercial transaction" since this included what he had known in business as an economic compensation. In this sense, at least as it applies to purely material property and goods, such as houses fields after etc.—once the transaction has been performed, if the buyer does not consider it fair or simply decides to back out one could simply decide to back out, one could repeal it after a period of twelve months counting from the day of the sale.

Chapter IX(4) of the *Mishnah's* aforementioned section on the "evaluation of votes" applies the law in the following sense: "If the last day of the twelfth month arrives and there has not been a redemption (of the house for example) it is definitely yours (meaning the buyer's) regardless of what has been purchased or what has been received as a gift as it is written in Leviticus (25,30): "in perpetuity".

Long ago (the buyer) would hide when the last day of the twelve month arrived so that it (the house) would definitely be his. However, Hillel the Elder said the seller could throw money into the Temple's chamber, break down the door and enter the house; and the other could come whenever they wished and pick up their money.

Consequently, Judas had acted in accordance with the law. He was not in conformance with the "sale" of Jesus of Nazareth and he made use of this right on the same day that he was paid for such a "transaction". Although Iscariot must have also known about Section 3 of the first chapter on the subject of the votes which clarifies that 'the moribund and one who is led to death (by the verdict of a Jewish tribunal could not be allowed grace) could not be an object of the vote, nor could they be evaluated.'

He forced his rights to the maximum and ingenuously believed that gesture annulled to said "sale". There are those who recognize that unloading all of the guilt on Judas Iscariot was the Teacher's advantage at least it terminated all of the other juridical possibilities. I suppose it was of little service, but I also think that it illuminated the justice of the act which was so parsimoniously related by the sacred writers. Many people could ask—as I have also done—why Judas agreed to this "sale" if he knew his betrayal would lead to the Nazarene's execution.

Personally, in view of Iscariot's behavior in the Sanhedrin's chamber, and afterwards in the treasury, I believe Judas never thought his Teacher would be condemned to death. He had delivered him to the priestly caste convinced that they were limiting themselves to taking "custody" of him, and interrogating him or at the most detaining and incarcerating him. I am not attempting to establish an extreme defense for the traitor, but the shameful capture and possible disbanding of the disciples had more than fulfilled his cold vengeance against the Galilean and his movement. However, as we know, events took another course...

Now what no one could be sure of is which twin weighed most heavily on Iscariot's agitated heart: the Rabbi's imminent death or the ridicule he had been subjected to by the Sanhedrin. As I have said repeatedly, it was not money Judas was pursuing. His obsession with public recognition and promised honors, were dreams that, unfortunately for him, would never arrive. If his machinations had been logically based on the final objective of obtaining money, then why would he dispense with the thirty silver coins? At any rate, he would have taken them to the grave with him.

During those hours, the traitor's internal struggle must have been so acute that I did not have the courage to judge him, nor his tragic ultimate decision. It is strange, but maybe if Jesus had not been sentenced to die, perhaps Judas would have succeeded in his second attempt to annul the "sale"? The law provided a one year period for the buyer in this case the Sanhedrin to retract the return of the merchandise. John Mark, who was then half-asleep, finished his testimony with news that was pretty different from what Matthew reported in his gospel.

"Judas descended to the lower district. At first, I thought he was going to my house or to Bethany. He was in a big hurry and he did not greet anyone. He left the city through the Fountain Gate. And to my surprise, he turned to the right in the direction of Hinnom's Gorge. He began to climb between the large rocks and when he arrived at the tallest one, he took off his belt and mantle.

"I was so scared that I was stuck to the ground shaking with fear. Then I saw Judas at the edge of a precipice. He was tying the end of his sash to the branch of a small fig tree that was growing between a crevice in the rock. When I understood what he was going to do, I stood up ready to ask him not to do it, but I didn't even have time to open my mouth.

"Iscariot made a knot around his neck and silently jumped into space...."

The boy was extremely pale. He covered his face with his hands and began sobbing. I had to wait for him to calm down. After a while he concluded with a whimper.

"It was scary Jason! I ran to the fig tree. At that moment, I only had one thought: to cut, bite, or rip away the belt. At least that would stop him from hanging. When I arrived at the abyss, Judas' poor body was swaying in the air, kicking, and turning as if he were a dradle¹.

¹ In the traditional stories about the Jewish festival of lights or Hanukkah (which often coincides with Christmas time), they were prohibited from gathering in groups to study the Torah. When the lookout alerted the group of students about the soldier's proximity, someone took a dradle or small die with a pointed base and a handle at the top and spun it. This way they could pretend they were betting on which face of the die would fall upwards. It is also possible to actually see Israeli children frequently playing with one of these dradles during the days of Hanukkah [Major's note].

His hands were clasped around his neck as if he were trying to fight off the asphyxiation and his eyes were very wide open—almost outside of their sockets. My knees shook and my throat was dry as though I had swallowed a mouthful of sand. But just as I was about to climb the little tree, the branch with the knot that held Judas to the branch and Judas fell into the precipice where he burst against the rocks.

“It was so fast I did not have time to do absolutely anything. I stood at the top like a post pondering Judas still body. I didn’t have the strength to cry then, so I returned to the city. When I tried to go back to Golgotha, an earthquake happened. My terror was so great that I came back to the Fountain Gate and fled to the campsite where David found me.”

I asked him if Judas’ body was still at the bottom of the ravine, John Mark shrugged. It seemed he had not mentioned this incident to anyone else. I was the first to know. I thanked him for the information and begged him to go rest.

“First thing in the morning tomorrow, it isn’t inconvenient for you, I would like you to go with me to the gorge,” I said.

John Mark assented like a robot and disappeared into the courtyard where they were about to start the Passover Seder. The boy’s version varied slightly from the always tragic fate of the traitor. It would be necessary to confirm if Judas had died from the hanging or from the fall. Although his intention was clearly suicide, perhaps the exact cause of death (assuming that he had died) had not always been what we knew and accepted.

I abused the family’s generosity by hiding in one of the corners on the lower level and wrapping myself in my mantle. It only remained for me to establish a final connection with the module to inform Eliseo of my intention to visit Hinnom and, supposing it was still there, examine Judas’ corpse.

Toward 21:30 hours, sleep dissipated my fatigue and my anguish. It seemed strange, very strange to me that Jesus of Nazareth was not alive and nearby. Without wanting to I had become accustomed to his majestic presence.

SATURDAY APRIL 8

Shortly before dawn, Eliseo awakened me from a deep sleep where I had been plagued by nightmares. Oddly, these were a mix of the most absurd situations and experiences from this “real” time where I moved as if I were in my true century.

The weather had changed. It promised to be serene with a calm wind, excellent visibility, low relative humidity with a temperature of ten degrees centigrade and rising. The module’s long range radar rendered a completely clear profile all the way to the arid Nile.

It was not long before John Mark arrived. He brought some bread that was made on Friday morning and a large bowl of goats’ milk. My exhaustion had disappeared and I practically devoured the frugal breakfast. At the first sign of light, the trumpets in the Sanctuary announced the new day and my young friend and I crossed Jerusalem’s deserted streets. The customary sound of grinding was absent. No one seemed in a hurry to get up. Part of me rejoiced. If Judas’ body was still on the rocks, I preferred for no one to see us near it. This would be safer.

Once we were outside of the city walls, the boy led me toward the west. He proceeded almost parallel to the city’s southern wall. A few meters away from where we exited the Fountain Gate, the terrain changed. We entered what the Jews call Gehenna or the “inferno”. I suppose it was named for the valley and the numerous bonfires, which burned here and there forming a permanent garbage incinerator. In fact, as we walked I observed how the grim place had been converted into an immense dump where countless stray dogs and enormous rats the size of rabbits roamed.

John Mark paused. He inspected the landscape and, in a few seconds, continued walking. After five minutes at this pace, Gehenna turned into a labyrinth of rocky barren ravines and small but sharp precipices. According to our maps, the elevations in the extreme south of Jerusalem varied between 612 meters and 630 meters in the vicinity of the Fountain Gate, and 685 meters near the Essene Gate. Between these two points, the contour of the ground changed abruptly with drops from 20, 30, and even 40 meters. In saving himself from the “inferno” I assumed that if Iscariot had fallen from any one of the crags, it was most probable that he would have been smashed against the sharp edged rocks.

At last John Mark stopped. We were at the top of a barren promontory 200 meters along in a straight line from the city wall. I pointed to a young fig tree which fit miraculously between the rough rambling fissures in the rock and which, just as it had been explained to me, grew with the center of its branches pointed toward the west over empty space.

I slowly advanced to the edge of the precipice. The nervous, trembling boy clutched my arm. At first I did not see anything abnormal. The almost vertical drop down the ravine was about 35 or 40 meters. Yet the dawn’s half-light was insufficient for me to distinguish the bottom with precision. Following a couple of minutes of intense searching, John Mark gave a shout which just about made me lose my balance.

“There! Look, he’s over there!”

I heeded the direction the direction his finger pointed and there was in fact a milky colored motionless bulk tumbled between the rocks which, from my vantage, appeared to be a

man wrapped in something similar to a tunic or a white mantle. I ordered John Mark not to move and I choose one of the mounds to initiate my descent.

Then in a no less roundabout way, I was scraped and startled between the precipice's slippery walls until I was at the bottom of the ravine a little more than four meters from the body. I watched it without moving a single muscle. It seemed to be unconscious or dead. Evidently it was a man clad in an ivory tunic, which was similar to the one Judas wore. He was face down and his left leg was violently flexed behind his abdomen.

When I finally decided to go closer to him, a hairy black mass as large as a hare ran out from under him and escaped into the nearby brambles. I stopped. A scalding chill ran through my insides. The rats had started to eat him. I quickly turned him over.

Iscariot's pale, pointed, beardless face appeared before me. One of his eyes was open with a mark of horror in the pupil. The other was virtually nonexistent due to the rodents' attack. As much as I examined his body, I did not notice any sign of blood. There was only the tiniest thread of blood which flowed out of the right corner of his mouth. But it was already dried.

I lifted the belt around his neck. On inspection, I realized his neck was not broken or torn. In accordance with John Mark's report, the belt had simply unknotted. It was still pressing against Judas' throat, but to my surprise the conjunctiva, which is the mucous membrane which covers the back of the eyelids and the area around his eye, did not show the typical red marks present in a hanged person. I moved his black hair aside but I did not see any sort of "welts" behind his ears.

His tongue was not pressed against his teeth nor did it have the blue color characteristic among hangings. If his circulation and cerebral drainage had truly been completely cut off, then Judas' face would have appeared dull. However, in spite of the fifteen hours which had elapsed since his hypothetical death, his face was almost normal. Although his pupil was dilated at first, it had begun to contract as he entered the "miosis" phase, possibly after 9 pm on Friday. He also exhibited the lividity appropriate for a post mortem state, but I reiterate that his jugular veins and carotid arteries did not show the signs of strangulation customary in a hanging.¹

Given this accumulation of negative evidence, my personal impression was the following: Judas Iscariot had not died from hanging, but from his fall. This theory was supported by the conclusions formed from my palpitation of his torso and his extremities. His legs and one of his arms had suffered quadruple fractures and generalized internal ruptures. But what finally convinced me was the sound his skull made when I shook it between my hands. The noise it made was similar to that made by a "sack of walnuts" is typical of persons who have experienced a precipitous fall or a fall from a great height.

Although it was likely that the Judas' was in a state of desperation, I never comprehended how the traitor, who was generally very meticulous, could commit the mistake of conveniently not tying the knot of his belt correctly so that he fell into empty space before he could perish from the hanging. I replaced the body on the stones, closed his eyes (or the one of them which remained open) and stood silently at his feet for a few moments as I contemplated this unfortunate man. I asked myself if Iscariot, a "Carioth-ish" man, who was the son of Simon, an illustrious and wealthy man from Judea, a disciple of John the Baptist, and a tormented truth seeker, really deserved such a desolate end...

¹ Legal medicine has perfectly researched the fact that it requires about 5 kilograms of force to fully shut off the jugular veins and 10 – 15 kilograms to do the same to the carotid arteries [Major's note].

I returned to my friend and confirmed Judas' death. John Mark had recovered his renegade mantle. We slowly returned to Jerusalem in silence. Once we were in the city, after I requested him to guide me to John Zebedee's house, I asked him if he could contact Judas' family so they would carry away his remains before the rats and the vermin at Gehenna disfigured him. The Marks' son fulfilled this new assignment with his customary extreme diligence.

John Zebedee was not expecting me. Yet, he greeted me with a close embrace. He had a little single story house located on the north side of the city, which was very humble and nearly empty. It was in a neighborhood known as Bezatha that was just starting at that time.

I avoided a small caldron containing small burning logs for warding off insects and mosquitos as I crossed the threshold. Inside the only room, which was sadly illuminated by an oil lamp, I immediately recognized four women. They were Jesus' mother Mary, his sister Miriam, John's mother Salome, and the Nazarene's younger sister Ruth.

There were no chairs or stools, so Zebedee invited me to sit on the matting that was spread over the packed dirt, which formed the floor. I found the singular austerity of this house with its roof made of branches covered with earth and clay, and without a single window or porthole, to be strange. Later I learned that this was not Zebedee's usual residence as he was from the north in Galilee.

John did not introduce me to the women. It was not the custom, besides it was unnecessary. All of the women were especially solicitous to Mary. One of them had just offered her a wooden bowl of milk. But the Galilean's mother refused to take it. When my eyes were accustomed to the semi-darkness, I discovered that her head was uncovered. Her hair was much darker than I had supposed. She wore her silky jet-black hair parted down the middle and gathered at the nape of her neck.

The black circles under her eyes, which were more pronounced than they were when I met her at the crucifixion, reflected her suffering and an overnight vigil. She was reclining on one of the thick mats made of palms and reeds with her back against the mud wall and her eyes half closed. Occasionally, a deep sigh shook her whole body and her beautiful almond shaped eyes half-opened.

For an instant, I caught the Hebrew woman's resigned bitterness and felt faint. I did not have the courage to interrogate her. My strength and fearlessness escaped from me since they were annihilated once they were confronted by the anguish a woman who had just lost her first son. How could I start a conversation? With what intrepidity could I face this woman who was broken by pain and ask her to tell me about her son from his infancy to his no less ignored adolescence?

John unintentionally smoothed this very arduously task that the Trojan Horse Project had scheduled as one of my final objectives on this mission. After shaking an old grimy goatskin, the disciple filled another bowl with the thick sour milk and urged me to accept this lowly refreshment.

"Don't worry about the smell," he advised, "It will quench your thirst even better."

I did not wish to offend him, so I shut my eyes, held my breath, and drained the bowl's foul smelling contents. When I finished, Zebedee took the bowl and pointed to the white linen mantle which hung from my waist. "I see you have not forgotten your gift."

I looked down and understood. Although I purchased this type of "shawl" for Lazarus' sister Martha, the disciple's genial suggestion caused me to alter my plans. In fact, this could be the ideal way for me to win Mary's respect and confidence. Why had this not occurred to me before?

Holding it in my hands, I stood up and went to the corner where the lady was resting. Then I knelt in front of her extending the rich present as I implored her to deign to accept it. Mary and the women who surrounded her looked at each other, and then they looked at me. Finally, the Rabbi's mother moved away from the wall and took the mantle while she covered me with her intense gaze: a gaze that reminded me of her son.

John, who was both attentive and accommodating, brought the clay lantern closer so Mary could better see the linen's fine texture. Under the light from the oil lamp, the woman's eyes rose before me in all of their beauty. They were green! Once she had caressed the material, Mary raised her eyes to me again. "Thanks, son!" she said as she showed her perfect white teeth.

It was the first time I had heard her coarse, but warm and steady voice. "I know you," she added, confused. "Where have I seen you before?"

I shook my head, intrigued by this apparent collective obsession. But "time" (never better said) would serve to clarify this very unusual situation. However, I must not get ahead of myself at this "time".

From that instant—at approximately eight o'clock in the morning—after John Zebedee explained who I was and why I was there, Mary willingly agreed to talk to me about Jesus, his first years in Nazareth, his trips to the Mediterranean and the accidental death of her husband, Joseph the carpenter and builder, in a work related accident. As I attempted to put my ideas and the thousands of topics that churned in my brain in order, I began by questioning her about the giant's birth.²

At around 11:30 hours, our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Jude and Joseph of Arimathea. They brought news from the past hour. Once the Passover Seder was finished, the Sanhedrin had convened a meeting. This time it was held in Caiaphas' house.

According to the esteemed man, the sole topic of the debate was Jesus' prophecy that he would be resurrected on the third day. The priests, particularly the Sadducees, knew not to give much credence to the words of an executed man. But the Sanhedrin's scheming members considered it wisest to establish a watch at the tomb.

"Therefore," Joseph continued, "they suggested the possibility that Jesus' friends and believers might steal the cadaver and then spread the lie that he had been resurrected. In order to

² The extensive account of the majority of this intense conversation with Jesus of Nazareth's mother appears with an infinite amount of new and fascinating data about the Galilean's infancy, adolescence, and adult life in the aforementioned diary and is included—for reasons of its length—in the next volume. I truly feel I am leaving the readers with honey on their lips [JJB's note].

prevent a robbery attempt, the high priest designated a committee responsible for visiting the Roman governor at the first hour of the morning on Saturday. Now, this group had just conferred with Pontius.”

As soon as Joseph was alerted by one of his confidants, he had rushed to the Temple. Though there were not a few gibes and indirect insults from the commission who were aware of his link with the Nazarene as the owner of the orchard where the Teacher was interred, he was finally apprised of the minute details of the conversation between the priests and Pilate.

“Governor, may we remind you of Jesus of Nazareth,” they addressed him. “During his life, this deceiver declared, ‘I will be resurrected after three days.’ Hence, we have come to ask you to give the necessary order for duly protecting the sepulcher against theft by his disciples until the three days have passed. We are aware that his loyal followers intend to steal the body during the night and immediately proclaim in the city that he has risen from the dead. If this happens, it will be a major mistake as bad as if we had let him live.”

After Pontius heard their request, he replied, “I will give you an escort of ten soldiers. Take them and mount a guard in front of the tomb.”

The Arimathean proceeded, “In addition to this Roman guard, ten Levites were recruited from one of the Temple’s weekly rosters. They are already stationed in front of the tomb; I verified it before I came to visit you. Those hypocritical beasts who surround and flatter Caiaphas don’t have the smallest scruple about violating the Sabbath and invading my property. When I tried to go down to the crypt, some of the guards from the Sanctuary would not let me pass and forced me to leave the orchard. It’s outrageous!”

“Then,” I sinuated, “None one can approach the tomb.”

“No one who is not from Antonia’s garrison or the corps of Levites. These savages have even removed the stone which covered the gardener’s well and put it behind the rock that blocks the sepulchral chamber. Then they affixed Pilate’s seal to it and no one can remove it.”

To be completely honest, this news left me worried. During the final minutes of my mission in Jerusalem, I was required to pass as close as possible to the tomb. It was logical for the Trojan Horse Project to have a special interest in investigating whether the alleged resurrection of the Teacher from Galilee was an objective fact or, on the contrary, a legend. How could I complete my observation if these twenty sentinels prohibited anyone from being on the path to the tomb? There were still many hours left and I preferred not to torment myself with such a dilemma. Something would occur to me. By changing the topic of the conversation, Joseph temporarily helped me to forget the matter.

To my great dismay, one of this venerable Jew’s largest concerns was the epitaph, which was to be engraved on the rocky facade of the sepulcher where the Teacher’s body rested. Joseph brought some writings, including some sentences, which he presented to Jude and then John to read. With serious expressions, the three men discussed the possible text until they concluded that the last one was perhaps the most appropriate.

I asked John to pass me the piece of parchment and I read the following in Aramaic:

‘Here lies Jesus the Messiah. There is neither gold nor silver here, only his bones. Damned be the man who opens it.’ I knew that plundering tombs was the order of the day in Israel, but I could not reconcile the lack of faith of Jesus of Nazareth’s intimate friends’, who did

not hesitate to apply the qualifier “messiah” to the Galilean, and yet completely renounced the idea of his resurrection. It was as sad as an anachronism....

Once they had decided on an epitaph, Joseph showed the chosen phrases to Jesus’ mother, but Mary refused to read them. She held the gazes of everyone present as she rebuked them for their distrust with a lapidary. “The messiah would have written his epitaph with a single word, ‘Resurrected’.”

A violent silence descended over all of us for several minutes. The Arimathean shook his head from side to side; John and Jude limited themselves to expressing their doubts by bowing their heads. Nevertheless, the lady did not insist. She leaned against the wall once more and half-closed her eyes.

The Arimathean tore through the embarrassing situation intent on convincing and us that we were not deluding ourselves. “The news of his promised resurrection has finally jumped from the street to all of Jerusalem so that it is on everyone’s tongue. If the Teacher does not fulfill his promise, what situation will that leave me and the rest of the disciples in?”

It was shameful that this position, which was held by a rational man, was probably the common sentiment shared by nearly all of the apostles who had been hiding in since Thursday in various houses in Jerusalem and Bethany. They were scared to death without the least bit of hope in respect to their futures. If these rude Galileans had enjoyed a faith like that of David Zebedee, for example, then things would have been very different.

Still, at the risk of repeating myself, I consider it very important to emphasize the apostles’ and the Son of Man’s followers’ ungrateful, but very human disposition in relation to the subject of the resurrection. There are those who thought that the disciples were excitedly awaiting dawn on the third day. No one in his or her sound mind could accept that a cadaver could get up and live 36 hours after death. Yet the surprising Rabbi had never spoken in vain.

Half an hour before sunset, at about six o’clock, Jude and his sister Ruth set out on the road to accompany their mother to Lazarus’ home in Bethany. John obeyed Andrew’s instructions by going to Elijah Mark’s house where he intended to have an urgent meeting with all of Jesus’ disciples and loyal followers who were in the Holy City. I offered to go with the Nazarene’s family so I could expand my knowledge about Jesus’ life.

At 19:30 hours, the resurrected man’s sisters received us at their hearth and piled their attentions on us. But the night began to wane, so I said good-bye to my new friends, thanked Martha and Mary for their generous hospitality, and announced that I was embarking on a long journey, but that I would almost certainly return soon. This pious lie, which possibly relieved Martha’s grieving heart, became a reality—a reality, which crowned the aspirations of this progressively less skeptical US Air Force officer.

With eyes satiny with tears, Lazarus’ eldest sister secretly confided to me that her brother had taken refuge in Philadelphia and they were going to join him there as soon as they could sell their lands and the house. I already knew the first part of her information, but—clumsy me—while I was saying good-bye, I had not guessed that she was including me in a confidence.

Shortly after midnight, I was worried about the advancing time and about finding a plan that would enable me to observe the mouth of the tomb with the maximum visibility and security.

I began to ascend Mount Olivet. Would he truly perform the great “feat”? Would I really have the magnificent opportunity to confirm the proclaimed miracle of the resurrection with my own eyes?

SUNDAY APRIL 9

It was approaching one o'clock in the morning. Without air in my lungs, and dripping sweat from all four sides, I finally spotted the wooden fence that surrounded Joseph of Arimathea's estate. Everything was silent. Deserted. I nervously walked up and down the side of the fence searching for some way which would lead me inside the orchard safe and sane. But my brain was water-logged by the expediency so it refused to work. As I walked up the peak of the Mountain of Olives, Eliseo had reminded me with imperious necessity that he was counting on my being present before 07:00 hours. The preparations for our return required a minimum number of checks and the definitive adjustment of the computer. I suppose I promised him I would return long before the mandated time. I do not remember it very well. My spirit had been excited as I ran down the slope to the city's northern zone.

Now with the mission nearly concluded, I felt incapable of crowning it as a success without what was to be the most decisive phase of the entire project. I inhaled deeply and without thinking any further, jumped over the side of the fence onto the estate. I could have opened the wrought iron gate, but I thought better of it. Those rusty impertinent hinges would have betrayed me.

Once I was among the fruit trees, I remained squatting for a few minutes, attentive to the smallest noise. Everything continued being calm. I encouraged myself as I dragged myself over the dry clay soil, covering each stretch with the help of my elbows and forearms. I had sprang over the left gate with the initial goal of reaching the back of the gardener's cottage. Once I was there, if the guards did not discover me long before then, I would think of something else.

I was taking small pauses and hiding behind the fruit trees' frail trunks as I tried to pass through a small knoll covered with trees while peeking through them. The moon, which was almost full, shone with a luminescence that could reveal me at a crucial moment. Just a few meters more, I said to myself, and I will have almost succeeded.

Panting, with my tunic reddened by the clay, I finally hid behind the stone side of the well which was located ten paces from the gardener's house. I slowly poked my head out above the ledge of the well and confirmed, to my relief, that the door was closed. There was no light inside and the chimney appeared to be inactive. Maybe the soldiers had forced him to evacuate his home, I thought. At that instant a mortal doubt dried my throat. And what if I had arrived too late? What if the supposed resurrection had already happened?

The only indication to this effect appears in the gospel of Matthew (28: 1-8). If the holy author was correct, and the miracle occurred in a place to grow a tree, on the first day—in other words—on a Sunday, then all was lost. The sunrise or the appearance of the sun's superior limb over the horizon had been fixed by *Santa Claus* with mathematical precision: given Jerusalem's approximate latitude of 32 degrees north, this instant would occur at 5 hours and 42 minutes. And the sunset would take place at 18 hours and 22 minutes.

An unexpected event took me out of these ruminations making me tremble from head to toe. Abruptly Joseph of Arimathea's dogs began barking furiously. I had not anticipated this new problem! I stuck to the wall of the well and tried to guess the dogs' positions. It did not take me long to determine it. Within two to three minutes I felt the animals growling at my back. I had detected them two or three meters away with their menacing jaws open. I turned around ready to

strike them or, if possible, not battle with them. In reality, these were two small exemplary dogs and I surmised it would not be difficult to frighten them away or hit them with “Moses’ staff”. I was very worried that the Roman or Levite guards would respond to the noise and discover me.

So I composed myself and straightened up to drive them away. But my blood froze in my arteries when a heavy, rough hand fell on my right shoulder. As I turned around with the thought that all was lost, the gardener’s immense silhouette stood in front of me. Before I could explain, he lifted his index finger to his lips indicating that I should keep quiet. He immediately motioned for me to follow him. Puzzled, I obeyed him like an automaton.

Once the dogs saw the tenant of the house, they fell silent and docilely followed him into the house. Then and there the gardener comprehended my intentions. He had recognized me as a follower of the Rabbi’s teachings; he expressed his delight for my supposed faith and promised to help me find a suitable place to satisfy my unusual and apparently crazy wish.

By slowly measuring each step this man went around the outside of the house and entered a small vineyard west of the crypt that I had glimpsed during my first visit to the orchard. On the edge closest to the smooth promontory where the Nazarene’s body had been entombed, there rose an enormous sort of storage shed a couple of meters tall. This individual hid me behind one of the wall panels of this mysterious “cube” and I stayed there.

“From here you can observe without any danger...”

And he promptly motioned for me to crouch down and enter a trapdoor which faced outwards on that side of the shed. Without knowing what awaited me I got on my knees and went inside. In my haste I forgot “Moses’ staff” on the ground. But when I wanted to go back, the gardener had lowered the trapdoor. I pushed it but it was locked from the outside! Now desperate, I listened as the gardener’s steps moved off in the direction of the cottage. What could I do? If I yelled, it would bring the guards and the soldiers. Furthermore, I thought to myself with a rampant nervousness, how am I going to get out?

A series of flutters returned me to the present. I looked up trying to identify the sounds. As I stood up the semi-darkness inside the shed was transformed, a bombardment of small white bodies crashed into each other, my head, and the walls of the cubicle. Instinctively, I covered my head with my arms. But the terrified beings’ continual comings and goings terrified me for several minutes. I crouched down again and gradually everything subsided. The floor was carpeted with feathers.

On examining them I understood: I was in a dovecote! Despite the scare I could not avoid emitting a stifled laugh. The good gardener had put me in a dovecote. To tell the truth, for more than a half an hour, my years of preparation as an astronaut, my studies, my research, and the training for this important project had not helped me in any way. General Curtiss simply had not foreseen this ridiculous scene and, of course, I did not have the least idea of how to appease about thirty male and female doves which were naturally frightened by the sudden arrival of an intruder into their home.

If I did not manage to pacify them, it was going to be very difficult to peer out of the metal grating at the top of the shed. I had tried to twice and the results were equally chaotic. Regardless of my soft whistling, tender words, and soothing gestures, the restless birds rampaged on both occasions. I surrendered and let myself fall to the bottom of the dovecote. I came to the thought of killing them, but I found even the idea repugnant. I sat with my head slumped over my

knees for a long interval of several minutes as I tried to recollect everything I had known or seen in relation to these animals. At the bare tail end of a memory, I recalled the figure of my grandfather who was an old duck hunter in the lagoons in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I reminisced about the sunrises in his company during the nostalgic vacations I had in my youth on the outskirts of Lake Pontchartrain. I remembered the grey herons—good heavens. Instantly, like a miracle, my mind was flooded with the image of my grandfather's face. He held a small branch between his teeth, snapping his mandibles while moving his head up and down in his imitation of grey herons in heat. This scene, which had always amused me, could contain the solution.

I searched, but I could not find a single branch. Without becoming discouraged, I picked up a feather that was larger than any of the others on the floor of the dovecote, then I put it in between my teeth and began to shake my head at a rate of eight or ten times per minutes. Gradually with a slowness that seemed like a desperate whim I was rising up toward the ceiling and the crossbeams as I endeavored to emit something like a coo.

I stopped halfway up and observed them without moving my head. This old system for attracting the female grey heron's attention in America seemed to be good. Some of the birds flapped their wings anxiously, but the majority remained impassive. (Ignoring the possibility that they were absorbed or confused or both by a poor idiot who pretended to make himself pass for a male dove.)

After ten or fifteen minutes, the Trojan Horse Project entered in a debt to my late witty grandfather: the doves which were now tranquil, ended up accepting or forgetting about me. (In fact this distinction has never been made very clear.) With the barrel of the feather still between my teeth and without ceasing to move my head, I finally peeked out of the metal lattice.

My position was just as the gardener had asserted; it was privileged. I was about eight or ten meters from the final stretch of the footpath which lead to the sepulcher's stairwell. The full moon superbly illuminated the upper part of the stone as well as the soldiers who kept watch at the edge of the same passageway or anteroom to the crypt. They had a bonfire burning and had formed two perfectly distinct groups which were separated by three or four meters. Little by little I could recognize the sentinels. Those who gathered around the fire were Roman infantry men. But I did not see a single officer. The second platoon also contained ten men, but it consisted of Levites. Curiously for more than a half hour none of the Temple guards addressed their supposed colleagues on duty. Either I was highly mistaken or they mutually ignored each other. Given the shared hatred between both camps, the situation was perfectly believable.

Although I was close, the mouth of the funeral chamber was not visible from this improvised observatory. I discovered it was below ground level; consequently it was a bit less than impossible to see. Even if I stood on the roof of the dovecote and looked into the distance, I would only be able to see the top of the mausoleum's façade.

This upset me. But I choose to mollify myself. After all, if "something" happened, these very guards would be the first to notice it. It was enough for me not to lose sight of them. Indeed, if they stayed there comfortably seated or lying on the ground, it was a sign that for the moment, nothing strange had occurred.

At 02:30 hours Eliseo activated the first of the "links in the chain" in exact accordance with the Trojan Horse Project's schedule. Starting at 03:30 hours my partner would remind me every half hour. From that moment until 06:00 hours, the "calls" for this is what they were, would

repeat every fifteen minutes. The project had foreseen as well as accepted throughout all components of the mission that in the case of a “serious emergency”, the module would take off even with only one of the astronauts. (At this level of the operation, a “serious emergency” signified one thing: I did not return to the site of the *cradle* prior to the automatic lift off.)

Of course I did not wish to worry my brother by telling him I was locked in a dovecote. For his part, at that time Eliseo did not report the strange signal detected by the Gun Dish, which was the onboard radar. “I didn’t want to burden you with new worries,” he would reveal when I returned to the *cradle*.

Apparently at around one o’clock in the morning, a flying object approached from the south, burst onto the radar screen and naturally disconcerted him. It was the third vehicle (?) we had detected since dawn on Thursday. It was an object that had kept relatively close to us; however neither Eliseo nor I could even imagine this during those critical moments.

At 02:40 hours the inexplicable happened.

As I was watching the guard’s movements, I noticed something odd. I do not know how to describe it. It was like a tremor. No, perhaps “vibration” would be a more accurate word. But it was a sharp almost instantaneous vibration, without noise.

It stopped in a question of seconds. My first reaction was confusion. I thought a dove had wavered as a consequence of a gust of wind. But two important facts were immediately evident. In the first place, there was no wind. Secondly, the doves would not have been affected by a sort of “electrical discharge” to call it something. This time I was certain I was not the cause of the doves’ commotion. They spread their wings and commenced to emit a sound similar to a turkey’s gobble.

If it had been another earthquake, Eliseo would have promptly warned me about it. Yet my partner’s voice was silent. I clung to the metal grating and concentrated my five senses on the soldiers. Two or three of them had stood up, but except for these, all was calm.

Two minutes had not elapsed when a new tremor or vibration or discharge—I swear I do not know how to describe it—lashed the doves and, judging from the centennials’ confusion, the scene at the tomb. The birds began to revolt. The vibrations continued one after another. They occurred almost without interruption with a force that made the panels of the fragile structure which imprisoned me shake. Simultaneously—and I think this was the worst part—a buzzing sound grew keener. It was infinitely more potent and piercing than the sound produced by a generator. It drilled through my ears, perforating my eardrums.

I thought it was driving me insane. I tried to protect my ears by covering them with my hands but it was futile. The whistling continued nailing my brain with a frequency very close to 16,000 Hertz.

I fell to the ground half-unconscious and when I thought my head was going to explode, everything stopped. The vibrations and the buzzing disappeared drastically. I raised my face to look at some doves on the floor that were either dead or experiencing spasms of agony.

I stood as if I was operated by a spring mechanism. What was that? What was happening? I peered outside to see the soldiers sprawled on the ground, screaming, and clutching their heads between their hands. Undoubtedly the buzzing had also affected them.

I called Eliseo requesting information about the time and a possible reading from the seismograph. It was 02:44 hours. Just as I had suspected, the instrumentation onboard had not detected an oscillation of the ground. Unable to restrain myself, I told Eliseo what had happened and established my concern about what was going to happen next.

There was complete calm for several minutes afterwards. The soldiers who were recovering launched into a heated argument about what happened. Some attributed it to an earthquake. In contrast, others spoke of a storm. A “storm”, I asked myself. I scanned the sky; it was still clear without the least hint of clouds. I declared to myself: impossible! I do not know of a storm which is capable of producing a buzz like that. Besides, how would that explain the tremors? Some of the Levites suggested that they should inform their leaders. Finally, on account of a lack of valid reasons, they desisted and sat down again.

At 03:00 hours Eliseo activated the second call. He asked me if everything was in order and I responded in the affirmative, then he advised me not to get distracted. “We will have tea at seven”, he said.

I pardoned my brother’s joke. I needed it. The tension was devastating.

Just when I was beginning to believe it was all a product of my imagination, a new event came to spoil the parenthesis. Seven or eight minutes after my last connection with the module, a weird, abnormal silence that was very similar to the one I had perceived at Gethsemane, descended over the area. I observed the doves. Visibly frightened, they inexplicably sat on the bottom of the small cells in the dovecote.

I sharpened my ears. Nothing. I did not detect the smallest amount of noise. Intrigued by the silence, the Roman soldiers were all standing. At 03:00 hours in the midst of this dense silence an electric shock ran through me from my feet to my head. Like a roar, like an iron hand which drags over a rock, this is how I began to hear the gradual sliding of one stone against another.

If I had not assisted when the enormous tombstone was used to seal off the Nazarene’s tomb, I suppose I would not have associated that rumble with the sound the millstone made as it rolled along the bottom of the groove. My presentiment was confirmed when one of the Levites suddenly appeared on the path to the sepulcher and launched into a jolting shriek. His companions and the Roman soldiers came to his side. As the seconds began to recede, they moaned and stumbled against one another.

“The stones!” they shouted in a full panic, “The stones are moving by themselves! The stones!”

Now the Temple guards were overcome by an inexpressible panic. They fled in all directions, screaming, and crashing into the lower branches of the fruit trees. Some of the members of the Roman platoon went back to the fire and unsheathed their swords. Two of them, I do not know whether they were paralyzed with terror or were more audacious than their companions, stood on the edge of the steps that lead to the mausoleum. For seconds which seemed like centuries the sound of the roaring circular stone, its rolling, and its scraping against the sepulcher’s stone façade penetrated everything. The Levites had disappeared from the orchard. Although the infantrymen were still scarcely meters from the mouth of the tomb, their faces were bathed with cold sweat.

Instantly the noise from the tombstone ceased. Almost at the same time a flare of light flashed in the passageway. It was not a fire. I would not define it as an explosion. Since, among other reasons, I did not hear a bang. I can only say that it was a question of a light or a flame or a bubble or a bluish white luminous radiation from something indescribable.

This luminous “explosion” (I can find no other word to describe it) exited the tomb. Of this I am sure. Then it instantaneously lengthened toward the nearest trees which positioned it a little less than four meters from the stairway which led from the mausoleum. Its oblique trajectory followed the most logical escape route. In a certain way it reminded me of an expansive but luminous wave.

In a tenth of a second, it vanished and everything was left in the most absolute silence. The soldiers were lying on the ground as if they were dead. I shifted restlessly trying to see someone. Here, I supposed something abnormal and inexpressible to the light of full reason happened. No matter how much I visually tracked the place from my vantage point, the tomb and its surroundings were deserted. The bonfire continued burning and no person had left the tomb (I swear). But who could have appeared on the stairway if it had not been Jesus of Nazareth himself?

Jesus of Nazareth?

Without thinking how or why, I sat on the floor of the dovecote furiously kicking the trapdoor. I had to leave. I had to enter the sepulcher and resolve the tremendous doubt which had just assaulted me. Was Jesus of Nazareth’s cadaver still in there? Damned door! Open up! After one of my violent kicks, the trapdoor flew into the air.

I slipped through the small door like a lunatic followed by a not less maddening whirlwind of doves. I recovered my staff and ran, ran breathlessly to the edge of the stairwell. The soldiers were still on the ground with their eyes wide open.

I started to descend the stairs, but in the middle I suddenly felt afraid. An irrational panic made my hair stand on end. I turned around and left that place for the road. I was suffocating and my tongue felt like cardboard. But when I was ready to venture aimlessly into the trees, something made me stop. It is possible my heart was wobbling since its rate accelerated above 180 beats per minute. I took a breath, leaned against the trunk of one of the fruit trees and tried to think. I had to go back! It was required!

I pressed the auditory connection and begged Eliseo not to ask me any questions. “Just talk to me. Talk to me nonstop until I advise you otherwise.”

Eliseo—bless him—did not ask me questions, however he was aware that something serious had happened to me, so he tried to cheer me up.

“I have a book in my hands,” he began “And I want to read you something. *Look to the east. Look to the east of your heart. There a new sun is rising...*”

While these verses resounded in my brain like a magical hand (I never knew who authored them), I retraced my steps along the path, trembling as I approached the pit of the crypt.

“They say it leaves trails of freedom...They say it is hope...Hope slept on the other side until today...”

One, two, three, four steps: I only missed one. I inhaled several times and drew closer to the tomb’s moonlit façade. The two stones had indeed been moved to the left so that the cave’s dark hollow was revealed. But if the twenty guards were up there, I asked myself, who had rolled the millstones away? Their combined weight was more than 700 kilograms.

Evidently the governor’s seals had been torn off and thrown into the passageway. I started to sweat. Should I peek? And what if he was not there?

“Look to the east...East of yourself...”

I have to do this! I crouched down on my heels and extended my head. The darkness inside the crypt was total: it was closed like a wolf’s mouth. This is impossible I thought; I need a torch. I returned to the top and removed a flaming log from the fire. Although the soldiers were still paralyzed, they were alive. Their pulses left no doubts.

“Daylight is breaking on the shore of your gaze...A new star already shines...”

I descended the stairs with my heart on the verge of fibrillation and thrust the torch into the gaping entrance. The reddish light instantly inundated the sepulcher chamber. I crawled forward a little more. Then I lifted my eyes and a jolt disintegrated my soul. The torch fell to the floor and I stood there on my knees with my mouth open and my eyes fixed on the stone bench...it was empty!

“It has already arrived...Now you have my sign in your hands.”

I was unable to contain myself. The tears began to roll down my cheeks. The fear had disappeared. Jesus of Nazareth was not here! My ears continued echoing Eliseo’s final verses. *It has already arrived...Now you have my sign in your hands.*

I wept and let the tears fall on the floor of that place while an infinite peace soothed my tortured heart. Without moving or even blinking, I examined the linens. The burial sheet was in the place that the Nazarene had occupied.

Between both sides of the linen in the place where the Teacher’s head would have rested, I discerned the sweat cloth or handkerchief Nicodemus had used to fasten Jesus’ jaw closed. It was as if the cadaver had been siphoned out with a small syringe! As if his 1.81 meter body had evaporated! The position of the “deflated” sheet over the exact location did not allow any doubts.

If someone had stolen or transferred the cadaver, the linens would not have been left in this impressive arrangement. But how? How? I repeated to myself incessantly.

First, there were the vibrations. Then the stones rolled, pushed by some invisible force; finally there was the “luminous “fire”. How? And now the greatest miracle of all time: an empty tomb.

It will be necessary to wait for my second “grand journey” to Palestine in the year 30 to begin to surmise what happened inside this sepulcher. It was the analysis of the linens which gave us a clue. I can anticipate this by saying that the Galilean’s resurrection—the physical and

miraculous act of resurrection—occurred minutes BEFORE the “disintegration” of his mortal remains. One has nothing to do with the other. Yes, the cadaver had disappeared, but I insist this was BEFORE Jesus performed the great miracle.

At last I informed my partner that I was ready to set out on a course to return to the ship. And at 03:30 hours, after I kissed the crypt’s rocky floor, I left Joseph of Arimathea’s orchard. The soldiers from Antonia’s fortress remained there as dismayed, mute witnesses to the most sensational news: the resurrection of the Son of Man.

And at 07:00 hours on that “glorious” Sunday April 9 of the year 30, the module lifted off with the sun. As it elevated us into the future, a part of my heart always remained in that “time” and with the Man whom they call Jesus of Nazareth.

January 1984.